

## Chronicle of Séert: 2

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This part (*Patrologia Orientalis* 5 pp. 231-342 ) contains stories 31 to 76 in this early 11th cent. Chronicle, written in all likelihood by Isho'denah. An index of the contents of Part 1 is provided on pp. 335-342.

I have to admit that the names in the translation are not written as they should be, but this is largely because they are not written using their own script. There are of course standard transcription systems, and while I am familiar with the Arabic one, I do not have the font necessary to reproduce it. For Persian and Syriac I have neither the font nor the knowledge to reproduce either. I can only hope that the names are at least recognizable.

The following is a summary of the preface to the text by F. Nau, one of the PO editors:

The Arabic text was sent by Archbishop Sher in 1906 without a translation. Part 1 was edited by M. Périer, and Part 2 was translated by Pierre Dib, who sent his translation to *PO* in 1908. The translation was revised by Father Ramia. and various notes are marked in the text with the initials S(her), D(ib) and N(au). Archbishop Sher was able to supervise the publication of the text while on a visit to the West.

The information provided by the text in the fascicule is not new but rather a summary of known facts without any attempt at 'editorial' rearrangement. The texts about Julian the Apostate are cited as examples of this.

The present work appears to be the indirect or direct source of the work of 'Amr and Sliba, *De Patriarchis Nestorianorum Commentaria* ed. and tr. by Enrico Gismondi (1896 and 1897). Examples to substantiate this suggestion are provided. This being the case, the Chronicle is probably the source of the Chronicle of Bar Hebraeus.

Many of the stories are summaries of the acts of saints and martyrs 'qui constituaient comme un

ménologe oriental'. These have for the most part been published by P. Bedjan *Acta Martyrum et Sanctorum* (from 1890) and Ch. 64 comes from the *Apophthegmata Patrum*.

### **31. Barba'shemin, the 11th Catholicos**

The name means 'he of four names'.<sup>1</sup> This father was celebrated for his purity, his sanctity and his chastity. He was the nephew of Barsabbae from Beit Garmai. He resembled his uncle in character and followed in his footsteps. The fathers, fearing the wretched Shapur, consecrated him secretly in the house of some of the faithful.

He consecrated bishops and ordained priests and sent them secretly to various regions. He told them to disguise themselves as lay people in order to hide. He lived like this for seven years. It was a chalice of great bitterness for him as he saw Christians maltreated and persecuted.

It was their intention to kill<sup>2</sup> the heads and the priests, thinking to deprive Christians of those who confirmed them in their faith and to lead them of necessity to Magism. As the reign of Shapur went on and the persecution became more savage, they became more numerous in many countries, and only God could count them. They prayed for the blessing of God in support against Shapur.

They became tired of hiding and came out into the open, crying out with voices loud enough to break rocks: 'Even if you hack us to pieces, we will never worship the sun or the fire. Do with us as you please.' It is said that 230,000 were beheaded, among them Mar Milas<sup>3</sup> and other leaders.

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1 Information found also in Bar Hebraeus *Chronicon* vol. 2 39-41 and the *Acta sanctorum et martyrorum* vol. 2 pp. 296-303. Another possible understanding: 'son of Baal of the heavens', in accordance with a name found in a Nabatean inscription cf. G. Westphal *Untersuchungen* (1901) p. 103

2 Supplied in the *app. crit.*.

3 Bishop of Sûshan

Shapur heard of Barba'shemin. He had him arrested and brought before him with sixteen other priests and deacons. He said to him: 'Did I not order the execution of the Christian leaders ? Why have you disobeyed me ? Why have you become their leader ?' Barba'shemin replied: 'Leadership of the Christians will not cease until the passing of the world.' He was thrown into prison with his companions and chained for eleven months so that they became black and entirely desiccated from hunger and thirst.

Shapur then sent him a cup of gold with 1,000 drachmas<sup>4</sup> with a message: 'Take these gifts I am offering you. I will release you and make you head of your people if you worship the sun.' But the blessed Barba'shemin replied to the royal messenger: 'Is he trying to deceive me like a child by asking me to renounce my Lord and taking gold ?' Shapur said to him: 'Take the presents I offer you. I will release you and make you head of your people if you worship the sun.' But Barba'shemin replied: 'Ask the king if he thinks he can deceive me as if I were a child and that I would deny my Lord and accept gold in exchange ?' Shapur said to him: 'If you do not accept the honour I am offering you, I will write to all the subjects of my empire to annihilate Christians.' Barba'shemin replied: 'The more Christians you kill, the more they will multiply.' So the king ordered his execution on the spot when Simeon and Shahdost had been executed. He was beheaded with a joyful expression on his face and a smile on his lips as he prayed for and blessed his flock. Thirteen others were martyred with him. In order to see him Christians gathered in such great numbers that they were jostling with each other. The Magi said: 'The words of Barba'shemin are true: the more Christians are killed, the more they multiply.'

The bishop of Susiane took the body of the virtuous Catholicos and buried him beside the archbishop of Gundishabur. The faithful took the other bodies and buried them. May their prayers for all be with the faithful. Shapur wrote to his subject to prevent Christians from choosing a new head and Catholicos to give the lie to Bara'shemin's words: 'being head of the Christians is not an idle matter.' But

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4 mithqâl (مثقال) given in Wehr's dictionary as 4,68 g

even in his ignorance he was certain that, though he might destroy the power in his empire, it would always persist elsewhere.

The Church was without a Catholicos for 39 years of his reign until the first year of Bahrâm, surnamed Farmanshah, at the age of 33. Barba'shemin was Catholicos for twelve years. The three fathers ordained by Shahdost were arrested. They were thrown into prison and left to suffer. At the time of Barba'shemin they were delivered with the help of God. They fled and went to live in caves. From that time there was no news of them. But in their new home they converted many, destroyed an idol worshipped by the locals and died in their retreats. Later, a monastery and school, where masters and pupils gathered, were built there and named after them. In the time of Mar Narses the buildings were enlarged.

### **32 Qardah the Martyr**

Qardah<sup>5</sup> lived at the time of Barba'shemin. He was one of the greatest Persians, noted for his bravery. When Shapur learned of his bravery and skill with a bow, he made him governor of the area from Garmai to Nisibis. He made Arbel his residence. Christians were very afraid of him. He built a castle on a high hill<sup>6</sup> and named it after himself. He was then twenty-five. But God - praise be to him - wanted him for His own. One night Qardah had a dream about a handsome young man who struck his side with a lance and said to him: 'You will be killed for the love of Christ before finishing this fortress.' Qardah said: 'Who are you to tell me this?' The young man replied: 'I am George the martyr, disciple of Christ and master of the Byzantine empire. I come to tell you what the Lord told me.' Qardah then woke up afraid without recalling the dream. Now, on the mountain of Beit Bagas there was a hermit called Abd Yeshu'. He too had a dream in which he was told to attend Qardah, for the latter was to inherit eternal life because of him. When Abd Yeshu' arrived, Qardah ordered him to be flogged and imprisoned, and this was done. One day Qardah was in the square playing polo when the ball stuck to the ground. They

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<sup>5</sup> The Arabic spelling

<sup>6</sup> Various forms in Syriac, e.g. 'melq'

tried to move it without success. One of them said to Qardah: 'The man you have just thrown into prison, I saw him raise his hand, make a sign of the cross in front of the ball and move his lips.' Qardah went home upset and very surprised. He summoned Abd Yeshu' and asked him about the beliefs of Christians. Abd Yeshu' explained and Qardah was converted and baptized. He then summoned another monk called Isaac, who read the gospel and translated it into Persian. Qardah stopped eating meat and drinking wine. He gave large donations to churches and monasteries. This upset his family. He spent two years in this way, fasting and praying.

Knowing he was reluctant to declare war, the Byzantines<sup>7</sup> and other nations invaded his territory and laid it waste. He marched against them and said: 'Do you think I no longer have the strength to fight? You are wrong. Christianity has armed me with an unconquerable sword.' He then fell upon them and cut them to pieces. And despite their numbers they were compelled to retreat before him.

On his return from the war he destroyed the fire temples and built churches instead. The Magi reported his behaviour to the king. 'You have heard that Qardah has become a Christian and destroyed the fire temples, but have you not heard that he routed thousands of Byzantines with his two hundred-strong cavalry? Have you not heard of the Arabs he has killed in his lifetime?' The mobed<sup>8</sup> and the Magi were disturbed with what they had just heard from Shapur: 'Tell us honestly if you intend to destroy Magism and affirm Christianity. Otherwise, why would we leave this man in peace.' Shapur was sad because of his love for Qardah, whose courage and bravery he admired. Nevertheless, he ordered Qardah to be imprisoned for seven months, to see if he would rebuild the fire temples and drive out the Christians. Otherwise he would be stoned at the door of his house.<sup>9</sup> Shapur sent two soldiers to him. Seven months elapsed, but Qardah remained unshakeable in his belief. He was brought out to be stoned. He asked Isaac to read out the story of Stephen<sup>10</sup> to

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7 Of the two designations used in this text I understand this one (روم) as 'Byzantine' and the other (يوناني) as 'Greek'.

8 Translator's note that this person was the equivalent of a Christian bishop.

9 The phrase 'at the door of his house': seems a curious detail. An extreme form of humiliation perhaps?

10 Acts 7

strengthen his heart. He was stoned uninterruptedly on his doorstep until he died. Large numbers of people gathered to see him. In the night Christians took his mortal remains and buried them. In year 49 of Shapur.<sup>11</sup> On the death of the latter - may he be loathsome to God and Hell be his dwelling place - the castle of Qardah became a great monastery where he is commemorated every year. May God remember us thanks to his prayers.

### **33. Julian the Apostate - may God curse him**

In 672 of Alexander, when Constans, son of Constantine died Julian the unbeliever became Emperor. He was learned in the knowledge of unbelievers. This despot turned against Constantine the Great, even though he was his grandson. He disengaged from the yoke of obedience, denied his faith and began to worship idols, to which he offered sacrifice. He gathered together magicians and sorcerers who persuaded him to leave the true faith in favour of their impious practices. He met Athanasius of Caesarea<sup>12</sup> and Gregory of Nazianze at Ephesus when he was studying philosophy. The two saints could foresee what would become of him and that his malign spirit would goad him against Christians. They were distressed by him and they warned the faithful against him. When he achieved power, he began to persecute Christians, forcing them to embrace his religion and sacrifice to idols. He destroyed churches and constructed pagan temples over them. He killed many of the faithful. He fought barbarians and occupied their kingdoms. People thought he was another Alexander. He attacked the Persians from Constantinople, immolating his victims and making use of magic by consulting the entrails of men, women and children he had killed.

When he entered Palestine, he allowed the Jews to rebuild the temple to give the lie to word of Our Lord: One stone will not remain on another.<sup>13</sup> But hardly did they

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11 359 AD

12 Note in *app. crit.* : Basil.

13 Matt. 24 and 25.

start work when the earth began to tremble, with cyclones that destroyed several towns near Jerusalem and ruined all the equipment used for the restoration. Red crosses appeared on the clothes of Jews and they were difficult to remove. Nevertheless, the impious Julian took no notice of the warning of Our Lord. He turned against the Persians, killed some and took others captive. He burned and laid waste towns and fortresses. Shapur was afraid. When it was clear that Julian had taken the Persian kingdom, he was struck by an arrow coming from the sky, near Seleucia-Ctesiphon. He knew what he had done. As he was dying, he said: 'You have conquered me. Galilean (his name for Our Lord). The kingdoms of heaven and earth are yours.'<sup>14</sup> The reign of Julian lasted 19 months and he was 31.

### **34. Another version of the Julian the Apostate**

The tyrant Julian rebelled against Constantine the Great, his grandfather. He broke the yoke of obedience, denied his faith and worshipped idols, to which he offered sacrifice. He assembled magicians and sorcerers, who persuaded him to reject the true faith to bend him to their will. Athanasius and the bishop of Nazianze saw him when they met at Ephesus, where he was studying philosophy and the magical arts. They saw what would one day become of him and the evil he would do to Christians. They were sad and warned the faithful about him. He consulted magicians about the future of his reign. They assembled the demons, whom they loved. But the despot became afraid of them when he saw them and smelled their vile smell. He made the sign of the cross, while continuing in his unbelief. The demons dispersed. The work of the magicians was to no avail. They blamed him and said: 'Your business was proceeding well until you ruined everything with the sign of the cross.' The wretch apologized to them and promised to leave the future to itself. Once again the demons gathered. Patiently they poured their greed and wickedness into his heart.<sup>15</sup>

Some explain his impiety thus: The sister of the king had secretly entrusted him

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<sup>14</sup> See Part One section

<sup>15</sup> Story in Theodoret III, 3

with much money and an object of silver and gold. She made the pilgrimage to Jerusalem. When she got back, she asked Julian for the money. He denied all knowledge of it and denied her demand. The king was told and criticized her for unwisely trusting him. 'Why did you not trust me with it ?' he said to her. 'Why did you trust him so easily ?' 'Because of his prayer and fasting', she replied. Julian was a genuine hypocrite. The king issued the following sentence against him: In the absence of judicial proof he had to swear an oath. He agreed and swore a false oath. He was reassured by this and his heart was possessed by a demon. He abandoned his religion and revealed himself for what he was. He forbade priests and monks to wear ecclesiastical garments and sent men to kill Anthusa,<sup>16</sup> the mother of John Chrysostom, and many of the faithful.

When he learned of the death of Constantius, he sent the following letter to Eusebius: 'From Julian, who for 100 years,<sup>17</sup> holds power in the world over everything beneath heaven, to Eusebius, the head Christian.

I have sent you 80 leaders that you might lead them and be one of the gods if you establish order on the borders of our territories, if you administer all that I entrust to you and if you remove Christian impiety from your heart. Wash and purify the big house stained by the Christian religion. Erect there a pulpit from which one will preach in my name, an altar nearby for the sacrifices to the seven and thirty-two gods who control the world.<sup>18</sup> And I have given my envoys rich presents for you worthy of my majesty and the greatness of my empire. I have added a lance stained with blood, destined for those who resist my orders, secede or withdraw from my command. If you hasten to obey me, I will make you rich and you will not have to shed blood for me. But if you disobey, you will be responsible for shedding it.'

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16 Arabic name: Qumbala (قومبالا)

17 It is worth noting that the expression of the 100 year reign occurs later twice, once said by Jovian and the other by Julian again. Is it meant to be a grandiose prophecy of the 1000 Year Reich variety ? Or perhaps a reference to the period that had elapsed since the ignominious capture of Valerian by Shapur 100 years earlier ? The entire episode, according to Nau's footnote, is extracted from the 6th cent. novel published by J.E.G. Hoffmann *Julian der Abtrünnige* (1880).

18 I do not know what these figures refer to.



When the news reached Eusebius the Patriarch that the letter despot had written, he hastened to gather the people of Constantinople and in a sermon told them what awaited them and what they had to endure in the present crisis. He then encouraged them to be patient and promised them the kingdom of heaven. He continued to encourage them and give them joy to prepare them for martyrdom and suffering, until they themselves accepted their fate. Those who still belonged to the Emperor rejected the Patriarch and obeyed the orders of the Apostate, like pagans and Jews, still loyal to the empire. About 60,000 remained true to the Patriarch and were immovable.

Some days later those with the gifts, letter and lance arrived in the capital, accompanied by Julian's sister. But the Patriarch had stationed guards to deny them entry, lest they profane the church with their unbelieving bodies. The guards were told to obtain permission to allow them to enter, because the envoys had instructions to obey the Patriarch. When Eusebius learned of this, he presented himself before them like a spiritual king. He asked them to read out the letter. After the reading, he seized it from their hands and tore it up: 'Go and tell this igoramus who sent you that his kingdom will be torn apart like this letter and that his blood will be shed in another country.' They dispersed in the city, telling people what had happened to the Emperor's letter and threatening them with great harm. The pagans and Jews went to Julian's cousin, who had brought the gifts, and promised allegiance. They also plotted to build a wall around the church to enclose those within, like a prison, and build altars for sacrifices. The cousin did what they advised and wrote to tell Julian. When the Christians learned of this construction, they rushed to the churches and monasteries to tell the monks and priests to join the Patriarch because he had been immured in the church. Monks and nuns, men and women gathered without delay, tore down the wall and tied up the despot's cousin and asked that those with him be burned with the wood from the altars for sacrifice.

The Patriarch forbade them. But they paid no attention and burned them. The

Patriarch ordered Julian's cousin to be saved. Once out of danger, he mounted a horse and returned to his lord to tell him what had happened. Julian was outraged and summoned his astrologer to tell him his fortune. The astrologer replied that he would begin his reign as a victor but the end was completely obscure to him. The Emperor said he was resolved to take his sword and massacre the citizens of Rome, burn the city and rebuild it. The astrologer told him that he would not manage this and that if he tried to inflict this punishment, he would be defeated by them, for this city is protected by two old men. <sup>19</sup>That if he did not base his power on Rome, he would not be called king but tyrant. He should be restrained until he was confirmed as Emperor like the others: 'If Rome recognizes you, you will be safe in the city and when you leave it. Whatever you do, victory will be yours.'

The wretch marched towards Rome, but nobody went to greet him. He wrote to the citizens to tell them that his intention was not to punish but to pardon them. He suggested that they attend him on the third day, feast of the gods, wearing white, because he too intended to wear royal garments and the crown, to have his name inscribed on the royal palace and distribute largesse to the soldiers. When his letter was read out, they clothed themselves in black and went to meet him. This angered him excessively. He said to them: 'I was wrong to treat you with consideration. I should have exacted vengeance.' They replied: 'You will never wear the royal cloak or the crown here. For, well before this meeting, you were careful to announce the persecution, but to preface your promise to behave well with threats. You will never receive royal honours from us unless you leave each nation in peace and make each religion free.' The astrologer advised him to accede to their demand, to receive the royal garb and withdraw. He then wrote a letter that was read out to the assembly. He told them that he had decided to assume the royal garb in this city, the first of the Roman empire, and gladden the people. Each one of them would have religious freedom. In this they would be different from those in other cities. He ordered them to dress in white and appear before him. The citizens changed and dressed in stylish expensive garments. The despot rewarded them with large amounts of money.

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<sup>19</sup> The Arabic 'sheikh' has rather more dignity attached to it than the English. Peter and Paul, the Christian version, one might say, of Romulus and Remus.

Everybody attended him and, for seven days, they gave themselves over to the games and dancing with young women.

He then told the astrologer: 'Allow me to pardon the Romans, but I cannot allow this disgraceful old man to live', meaning the Patriarch. The astrologer replied: 'Do not oppose this person. You have no authority over him. He has the two old men at either side of him. But Julian did not listen and summoned the Patriarch to his presence: 'Do not think I am putting you to death because of your religion, which would make you happy, but because you have killed 80 priests, servants of the gods.' The Patriarch replied: 'You impious one will not be able to take my life. These people were rather the servants of demons. Are you not ashamed to call these demons 'gods' ?' Julian ordered him to be bound and placed on the altar for the sacrifices, a fire to be lit and Eusebius to be consigned to the flames. But the Patriarch repelled those who would bind him. The Emperor ordered fire to be cast at him from all sides of the altar. But no sooner had the order been given than a strong wind rose up and blew out the fire. It was followed by thunder and lightning, and the fire was split into two and consumed those in charge of the stake together with idols and many unbelievers. But Julian quickly mounted a speedy horse and was able to escape. The Patriarch kept to his place, safe and sound. He came down from the altar, worshipping God and asking Him for a miracle. He returned to the church where he was greeted with prayer, joy and tears because of the sublime things that they had just seen. Three days later, Julian ascended his impure throne and summoned the Patriarch: 'Do not think that it was the Christian God who did this. The gods were annoyed with the priests ...<sup>20</sup> for having placed an unclean offering on the altar. Today, you lose. Go and tell the Nazarene, your saviour.' Eusebius replied: 'You will soon see how the Nazarene will destroy you and make you the object of people's conversation.'

The wretch ordered the saint to stand upright and told the archers to fire their arrows at him and the executioners to stand behind and kill him with their swords if he tried to escape. Each arrow rebounded against the archer that had fired it and

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<sup>20</sup> Unknown word

killed him. Julian, angry, ordered the executioners to put him to the sword. But as soon as a sword was unsheathed the hand of the swordsman withered. Julian then said Eusebius: 'What is the meaning of this magic of yours ?'

The astrologer said to Julian: 'The empire is yours. Leave this place and let the old one go.' But Julian ordered the saint to be out in chains and thrown into a dungeon. He then left Rome and returned to Constantinople. He wrote<sup>21</sup> to them, as he had written to the Romans. It was read out and one of the nobles<sup>22</sup> tore it up. Julian's cousin was told of this. As Julian was approaching the city, someone came to meet him and ask him to pardon the noble. Julian agreed. But the noble clothed himself as a servant<sup>23</sup> to be near to the Emperor and, when he had the chance, struck, saying: 'You will be pursued by misfortune during your reign.' The crown fell from his head. The noble was struck with lances and died. Those who had interceded on his behalf requested his corpse from the Emperor to bury it, and permission for them to do was granted.

Julian chose from among the nobles a wise man called Jovian and made him commander of the army. He took him along to ...<sup>24</sup> Four hundred Jewish priests came from Jerusalem to meet him, carrying a crown and the seven idols.<sup>25</sup> At first, he was distrustful and took them for Christians. But, having discovered that they were not Christians, he said: 'If you obey, eat meat that the Law prohibits.' They ate. They worshipped their gods and sacrificed several times. He welcomed them warmly, took the crown and promised that on his return he would rebuild the Temple destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar.<sup>26</sup>

When he learned of the luxury and magnificence of the Church at Edessa, he ordered Jovian to demolish it and recover the precious marble from it. Jovian said: 'Our reign is 100 years. If we were to spend (the contents of) the treasury, we would

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21 The author of this text seems to be aware of Julian's taste for writing letters.

22 Maximus, according to the footnote's reference to Hoffmann *op.cit.* p. 79

23 Syriac passage with similar wording, cf. Hoffmann *op.cit.* p.95

24 Lacuna

25 Jews from Lake Tiberias are said to have made a crown with seven images. Hoffmann p.108

26 Not to mention the destruction by Titus.

not build anything like it. It is more reasonable to lock it up with imperial seals until we return. After that it will be cleaned, purified and consecrated to our gods.'<sup>27</sup> Julian approved of this and wrote to the inhabitants of Edessa, reassuring them of his goodwill and admiration for the splendour of their city. He also promised to send them forty of his priests to purify this fine building for sacrifices to the gods. The people of Edessa tore up the letter and prevented his people from entering the city. When he learned of this, he told the commander of his army to march into the city with his troops, but he said: 'Christians believe that dying for religion is living. Besides, the city is always in our hands and our reign is of 100 years. Now we have to turn to the enemy. Let us go there lest they be on their guard and closes the gates of Persia to us. Besides, the people of Edessa will perhaps have regretted their error.' The Emperor saw the wisdom of this and ordered the army east. The commander left for Nisibis and the people in Edessa covered the walls with sacks and threw ashes on them, a sign of mourning for the loss of Constantine. As Julian passed by Harran, he was well received by the residents, infidels like himself, who never failed to abuse Christians. He celebrated their local gods' feasts and gave them money. He then made for Nisibis, accompanied by a throng, when his horse stopped. He struck it, and the horse turned to him. The reins became entangled in his garments and tore his imperial purple. His crown fell off and the royal standard, borne before him, broke. The Emperor was upset. He gathered 400 priests and all the magicians of Harran and wanted to know what had just happened. He was told that Christians hiding in his army were defiling it and the gods were angry and that he should tell them to go away. Julian, in fact, had brought along a cross that his soldiers could see. If his army were defeated, he could blame the cross; if it were victorious, he could attribute the success to his large army. The cross was removed from his army of 10,000 cavalry, which proceeded to Edessa and engaged the citizens.

At Nisibis there was a bishop called Ula', <sup>28</sup> who preached to the people: 'If you love

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<sup>27</sup> It is difficult to escape the feeling that in policy exchanges with advisors Julian is often portrayed as someone of little practical intelligence.

<sup>28</sup> According to the footnote, the name in Syriac is ܘܠܐ and I suspect that the Arabic form should be ٴولاع

the kingdom of heaven, follow me to the village of Ma'are. Let him embrace the faith with us and never again abandon the love of Christ.' Tens of thousands followed him and swore an oath on the gospel that had been placed in the midst of them. Jovian found out about this and turned towards them. When he saw them, he told them what he had been thinking in secret and stayed with them, fully intending not to return to the camp. He had seen the angel of the Lord, who said to him: 'Christ has received your deed. Do not be sad and do not be afraid for Ula'. He will not be harmed or any of his people. Go back to your camp. Continue to command your army and, with your help, I will convert them to Christianity. Do not reveal your faith, because I have something else for you. Tell Ula' and those with him what I have just told you.'

The commander of the of the accursed Shapur, king of Persia, ....<sup>29</sup> was also a believer. The angel visited both and told each one that the other was a Christian. When Julian was at Harran, Jovian wrote to Urfahârmubata<sup>30</sup> the Christian and commander of the Persian army that the Roman army was marching against the Persians, they were more likely to receive the faith than the Romans, that it was therefore necessary to conceal this from Chosroes<sup>31</sup> and guarantee victory to the Romans. The Persian general replied to Jovian and asked him to hasten before the king found out about it and deployed his army. He then promised to arrange everything for the conquest of the whole of Persia and bring back the Persian king alive to Caesar, who would ...<sup>32</sup> the eyes of Chosroes and parade him before the Roman soldiers. As for the Persian soldiers, they too would be handed over to Caesar.

Julian one day heard prayers being said at Ma'ara.<sup>33</sup> He wanted to know what they were. An opponent of Jovian told him that the head Christian was in league with

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29 Critical apparatus note: 'illegible word'.

30 Note: Hoffmann p. 107 gives the Syriac form Armihar the Mofta (ܐܪܡܝܗܪ ܡܘܬܬܐ)

31 Shapur

32 Lacuna. I wonder if the expression is similar to the colloquial British English 'have your eye wiped', meaning 'to unexpectedly experience something unpleasant'. Or perhaps Chosroes would be blindfolded as an act of humiliation ?

33 These meetings had been reported to Julian by the Jewish opponents of Christians.

Jovian, who was becoming dissident and had left for Ma'are with some friends.<sup>34</sup> Jovian remained there, according to the informant, and sacrificed to their gods, all of this while Julian was at Harran. Julian sent troops to besiege Ma'are and summoned Jovian. He then ordered Jovian's tunic to be torn from him and Jovian to be stripped of his command. But for fear of provoking the nobles of Constantinople, he let Jovian live, because he was of local nobility. He replaced Jovian with the informant. But, providentially, Jovian's envoy to the Persian general arrived with a reply to his letter sewn into his garments. Jovian's replacement seized the messenger, who told him that he had just returned from the Persian general. Jovian's opponent told Julian that the former imperial confidant had been communicating with the enemy. Julian questioned the messenger, who removed the letter from his clothing and showed it to the Emperor. Julian read it and saw that the Persian general accepted the proposal outlined above. He felt great joy: 'What an astute man ! He was preparing our victory while appearing to be suspicious, and we favoured his traducer !' He then ordered the siege of Ma'ara to be lifted and no one to be persecuted because of religious faith; everyone should be free to choose religious belief and pray for our victory, for we are on the eve of battle with our enemies; and as for Ula' and his followers, we will let them worship their God to pray for our victory. He then summoned the traducers of Jovian and had them crucified. He let it be known that anyone who slandered Jovian would receive the same treatment. He apologized to the people of Constantinople<sup>35</sup> and asked to bring Jovian to him, whereupon he re-invested him, mounted him on a charger of his chariot and ordered the nobles to arch in front, with the crucified in front of them. In this way he triumphally paraded before the army. When Jovian returned to the Emperor, he handed him the letter of Urfârmubata<sup>36</sup> and told him to act in accordance with the letter. He swore to him that he bore no ill will for what he had done. Jovian swore an oath and led his troops to the Tigris. He had 80,000 cavalry, 120,000 archers, 200,000 well armed soldiers, 200,000 with shields, lances and all sorts of weapons and 120,000 officers.<sup>37</sup> By the time the Byzantines had entered

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34 Text not clear

35 Ar 'qustantinia'. قسطنطينية

36 S(her) suggests reading 'mobed' with 'Aderbira', a sort of Persian fire-temple angel

37 Translator: 'nombres plus forts dans Hoffmann p. 162', which I do not understand. The mere thought of an army of

their country, the locals, unable to organize resistance, and did not have a chance to group themselves and were put to the sword, their citadels and fortresses destroyed. The Byzantines became masters of the region. According to some accounts, the army was 490,000 strong.

A witness to the massive bloodshed, the noble Jovian said to Julian: 'It would be better for us to rule a prosperous country than one in ruins and forever be called murderers. If the land is not well populated, it will not support us. It would be better to move people from one town to another.' The Emperor agreed and announced peace. The Persians were grateful for this and pledged allegiance to him. Shapur fled to Seleucia-Ctesiphon, where he took possession of riches of mountainous proportions. He celebrated the feasts of the gods. The wretch also prostrated himself before Aphrodite, to whom he prayed. He then collected an army as numerous as the grains of sand, occupied the outlying districts of the city to prevent the Byzantine army from leaving or entering. Between the two armies was the village of Beit Nasab. Jovian sent word to the Persian general: 'Is this how you keep your promise ...'<sup>38</sup> "I will deliver Shapur to you" ?' Aurfahâr<sup>39</sup> said to Shapur: 'You are near your enemy, and all that remains is to meet him. Do not attack a people of whom you know neither the strength nor the weakness.'

### **35. Yunan, Anchorite of Anbâr**

[... Beginning is missing ...] There was also a man drawing water with a pail. Early one day he went to draw water from the Euphrates,<sup>40</sup> and he was bitten in the foot by a viper. The saint was told. He came to see the man and made the sign of the cross over the bite. The man was cured that same night and went back to drawing water in a pail.

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almost three quarters of a million, all apparently marching together, is quite staggering. The total number of legions, for example, that could be deployed under Augustus was about 25 (max. 150,000)

38 Illegible

39 Syriac: Arimhar

40 Syriac version slightly different



Around his holy tent there were wild beasts ...<sup>41</sup>, but they did not dare attack the saint's visitors. One of the animals was struck by the sword of a hunter and it came to the saint growling in pain. The saint arose, took some earth, blessed it and applied it to the wounds. The animal was healed instantly.

The two saints Mar Yunan and Mar Eugene, together with other brothers, went to see the king, who had heard about Yunan and his miracles. When Shapur saw their glory, light and splendour, he welcomed them with great respect, veneration and kindness. He listened amiably to them and treated them with familiarity. The Magi became envious and came to debate with Mar Eugene. Despite being vanquished in the presence of Shapur, they persisted in continuing. Mar Eugene said to Shapur: 'Let the king order a large fire to be lit in his presence. We will enter it with the Magi who have been debating with us. He who remains safe and sound, let his God be recognized as the true one.' Shapur, surprised by this, arranged it with the Magi. Wood was brought and the fire was lit. Mar Eugene said to the Magi: 'Go in first and stand upright in the middle. You will not be harmed by the fire because you worship it.' If the words alone were difficult for the Magi, the practice was impossible. Mar Eugene said to Mar Yunan: 'Throw yourself on the fire, my brother.' Mar Yunan, eager to astonish the king and his priests, removed his sandals, threw his cloak over his shoulder and walked barefoot to the middle of the fire, where he sat down among the flames around and above him. Shapur thought that Mar Yunan would not remain safe and sound for long in this inferno. He was amazed and thanked God and said to the Magi: 'Now it is your turn. Stay there, if you can, with the Nazarenes.' They refused. The king said: 'Think of the consequences of your refusal and the punishment that awaits you. I will hack off your limbs and plunder your houses.' This was no sooner said than done. Mar Eugene told his companion to come out of the fire. Shapur and the nobles of his kingdom were astonished that there was no trace of the fire on the saint or his clothes or hair. At nightfall Mar Yunan left the region and retired to the desert of Anbâr. We have told of only a few of his miracles. There are so many of them. He asked his friend, the Marzbân<sup>42</sup> that

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41 Critical apparatus, and so on., perhaps demons'. Syriac version specifies 'lions'.

42 Governor of a frontier province

his tent be transformed into a place of prayer after his death, where the name of God would be glorified. After his death he was buried on the site of his tent, and nearby a sanctuary and several cells were constructed.

The brothers and residents wanted to transfer the body of Mar Yunan from his tent to another place, but no agreement was reached. Wasps came out of the tomb and attacked them. One of the people had a dream in which someone said: 'Do not tire yourselves, for Christ has chosen someone to transfer him to another sanctuary.' He then appeared to Mar 'Abda, son of Hanif,<sup>43</sup> and told him to go and pray near Mar Yunan and take his body to the sanctuary of Anbâr. The brothers all gathered and, carrying the cross and the gospel. They went there in their turn. After praying, Mar 'Abda began to pray and prostrated himself before the shroud of Mar Yunan. He lifted the shroud with his brothers and carried it in triumph, singing hymns as on Palm Sunday, to the place where his body still rests. There were miracles and prodigies. The body of the saint was found to be intact. Unwilling to put the body in the ground, the fathers placed it in a wall to the right of the altar, near the baptistery. Mar 'Abda the anchorite<sup>44</sup> said farewell to his brothers and left.

May the prayers of this saint protect us. His commemoration day is the third Sunday of Easter.

### **36 John of the monastery of Beit Zabde**

He was a disciple of Mar Eugene, who withdrew to the land of Beit Zabde and lived in the desert. He travelled to all the villages converting the people. He built a church. After his death he was buried in the monastery of Castra.<sup>45</sup> He constructed a building that was formerly a house of idols and demons, but every time the monks went to draw water from the spring, they were stoned by the demons, and it got worse, so they raised the shroud of the saint and put it on the spring for three days. The stoning stopped. The body was transferred to the place where he was buried in

<sup>43</sup> The translation must have taken place many years later because Mar 'Abda is attested only in the 7th cent.

<sup>44</sup> The Arabic is a form of the Greek word

<sup>45</sup> The fortress of Beit Zabde.

the monastery

Rabban Afnimiran from the monastery of Za'farân<sup>46</sup> bears testimony to the worth of this saint and attests to the truth, in a work written by himself, of what has been told here.

### **37. Rabban Sari**

This saint, disciple of Mar Eugene was one of those who accompanied him to the desert of Egypt. There were about twenty-eight of them. He went to the desert of Darâ, built churches and monasteries, converted some and cured many sick people. At the end of his life he built a monastery that still bears his name.

### **38. The monastery of Zarnuqa**

Mar Eugene had a disciple called Aha. He went to Beit Zabde and converted many. He built a large monastery<sup>47</sup> with many monks. After his death he was buried there. The monks had difficulty drawing water with a pail. God demonstrated His benevolence thanks to the sacred remains of the saint and the prayers of Isho'barnoun. A spring of very sweet water arose from below the foundations the church, and this saved them a lot of trouble. For this reason the monastery is called Zarnuq.<sup>48</sup>

### **39. Mar Cyprian, bishop of Africa**

Among the celebrated doctors and monks of the time was Alzenon, a monk of the desert of Egypt, Isidore in the desert of Scetis <sup>49</sup>and Cyprian who became bishop of Africa. The latter was a pagan originally, who distressed the faithful with his words

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<sup>46</sup> NW of Mosul

<sup>47</sup> Ar. دير

<sup>48</sup> I do not understand this

<sup>49</sup> I cannot identify either of the people or the 'Egyptian' desert. An Isidoris known at Nitria, which may have been confused with Scetis (Wadi Natrun). Two saints called Cyprian (one of Antioch and one of Carthage) have been fused together.

and deeds. He believed in magic and practised it. He was a well-known fornicator of unbridled passion. God chose him and detached him from paganism through the offices of a holy woman called Justa. Faith and knowledge grew and became manifest in him, and he burned the books he had used in his magic in the presence of all.

Consecrated bishop of Africa, Cyprian gathered together, on the orders of Stephen and Cornelius Pope of Rome, 19 bishops. He demanded the re-baptism of those who had denied the Trinity and published twenty canons on the subject. He wrote a defence of Christianity, baptized many and refuted the errors of Paul of Samosata in writing. He was martyred under Valerian, the Emperor, with Lyrmasus, Patriarch of Jerusalem.<sup>50</sup>

#### **40. St Barshabâ**

He was one of those exiled from the west by Shapur son of Ardashir. He learned Syriac at Seleucia-Ctesiphon. He also learned Persian, studied the books of the church and became well-known for his medical knowledge. Dressed as a foreigner he confined himself to the house of God. He did not eat meat or drink wine. He practised asceticism from an early age. Shapur heard of him and summoned him. The saint attended Shapur's wife, who was suffering from an illness, and cured her. Shapur became very fond of him. But he had a sister called Shirarân, whom he had married in accordance with Magi law. She was possessed by a demon, which tormented her. Shapur asked all the astrologers, doctors and magicians to cure her. They suggested every cure and remedy possible, but to no effect. She had a dream of a person who told her not to be afflicted with pain but to become a Christian and be cured by baptism. She thought about this vision, and the following night had an astonishing dream<sup>51</sup> in which she was told: 'Shirarân, do not be afraid. God has chosen you. He will lead you from the kingdom on earth and you will become His

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<sup>50</sup> It was Sixtus II who was martyred with Cyprian

<sup>51</sup> Reading uncertain

servant and cured of your sufferings. Believe, have yourself baptized, and the demon will leave you.' She sent to Seleucia-Ctesiphon for Barshabâ, unrivalled by anyone at the time. She told him what had happened. The saint explained Christianity to her, told her what she needed and showed her the horrors of the religion of the Magi. She believed, was baptized and renounced the worship of earthly things. The demon left her. She then devoted herself to the pursuit of knowledge. The Magi were extremely disturbed. When Shapur heard of this, he became angry and refused to believe that the demon had left her. He said he would kill her if she did not worship the sun. The Marzbân of Merv, who was a descendant of Sâsân, was with him when he returned from Nisibis at the time of the treaty with Jovian. Shapur explained his sister's condition and told him to remove her from the Christians and anyone who might teach her Christianity. He was afraid that she might suffer the same fate as Estassa, who had been put to death for her Christian belief. He also allowed the Marzbân to marry her. Daniel son of Maryam talks of this in his book.<sup>52</sup> The Marzba took her with him and married her. Before she left, she asked the bishops to make Barshabâ bishop: there had been no Patriarch after the murder of Barba'shemîn because of the prohibition of Shapur.

When she arrived in Merv, she continued to convert all who came to visit her. She told them what had happened to her, that she had been cured when she embraced Christianity. She explained the horrors of their religion and promised that Barshabâ would visit them. Some people in Merv accepted what she said. Of Greek origin, they had come with Alexander and helped to found the city but had not returned with him. They embraced Christianity and destroyed the idols they had worshipped.

She asked architects to build her a church. Not knowing what form to give it, they adopted the design it on the same plan as the royal palace. She called it Ctesiphon, the name of the Two Cities.

She had a son by the Marzbân. She wrote to Shapur, asking him to send Barshabâ, because her illness had returned. Shapur, happy with the birth of the child, sent

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<sup>52</sup> Footnote ref. to G. Assemani *Bibliotheca Orientalis* (4 vols. 1719-1728) III part 1 p. 231.

Barshabâ in great ceremony.<sup>53</sup> He took priests, deacons and liturgical books and ornaments with him. He was received by a crowd at Merv. He made his way to the church and thanked God for His gift to the queen. He consecrated the altar, baptized people and cured the sick. He also baptized many Magi. He built several churches there, which he endowed with funds, vineyards and other goods. Glory be to the Almighty ! From the house of the king he sent some to preach the gospel in the whole country of Khorâsân. In fact, Barshabâ's disciples spread throughout Khorâsân, building churches and baptizing. Barshabâ then died and was buried in the monastery of David. His death made the people of these countries afraid and they wept for three days. On the fourth day after his burial they saw a light on his grave and inhaled a fragrance and heard a voice saying: 'I have heard the sound of your voice. I have replied to your call and sent Barshabâ as your bishop who will look after your souls.' Barshabâ came out of the grave in the presence of everyone. Some were doubtful and thought he was a ghost. But they found his left eye transformed and believed in the truth of the resurrection. Several embraced Christianity. Barshabâ lived another 15 years. He had been bishop for 70 years. If God prolonged his life and resurrected him from the dead, it was because of his zeal for this people, to help converts from paganism, to keep their children in the faith, strengthen their souls and increase their faith and belief in the resurrection, as God did with Moses when He left him in the desert with all those who had come out of Egypt with him. It was only their children, who did not know the gods of Egypt, who lived after him and entered the Promised Land.

God had performed the miracle of resurrection many times when He saw how useful it was for the people of that period. He revived St George the martyr, as a result of which many became Christians. Christians of all sects and empires recognize the worth of this martyr. commemorate him and build churches in his name. Mar John Dailomaya<sup>54</sup> entered the fire and came out safe and sound. Peter resurrected Tabitha after her death to strengthen the faith of his disciples. Mar

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<sup>53</sup> The form in the text and the form in the critical apparatus are slightly different from each other, but I can find neither in the dictionary.

<sup>54</sup> Footnote: There is a poem in his honour ms. syr. 2020 in Cambridge.

Nestorius<sup>55</sup> resurrected a dead man to confound the impious who had exiled him. God extended the life of Hezekiah that he might marry and have a son to inherit his throne. There are many to whom God restored life after their death. Barshabâ died and was the first to be inscribed on the diptychs<sup>56</sup> of Merv. May his prayers preserve us.

After the death of Shirawan,<sup>57</sup> Asphahid<sup>58</sup> of Khorâsân, Shapur transferred the office to his nephew Khoshken, who was given in marriage to his sister, daughter of Shirarân. Khoshken was well-disposed to Christians. Before his mother died, she told him to look after the churches, take care of Christians and reduce the tax burden on them. She also entrusted the welfare of her daughter to them both, and they fulfilled her command, doing what she had advised throughout their whole life. Her daughter Zarndoukht followed the religion of the Magi, like her father. Nevertheless, she had a keen interest in Christian churches.

#### **41. Rabban Shallita**

At this time Saint Shallita appeared at Alexandria. He fought against the Devil with his good conduct and was an opponent of the Arian party. The governor, an Arian and implacable enemy of the faithful, struck him and drove him out of the city. He went to the land of the Copts,<sup>59</sup> among whom he cured a leper, which made many converts. He then travelled to Nisibis with Mar Eugene. After the dispersion of his disciples, Shallita turned towards Beit Zabdai, where he converted the entire town, smashed an idol they worshipped and built a monastery that still bears his name. He then went to Balad to be blessed by some saints. He died there and was buried in a cave known as Awana opposite Balad, at a place called al Duweir in a forest. A

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55 This seems to be one of the few references to Nestorius in the text.

56 Usually lists of living and dead. If the name of a living bishop was on a diptych in a church, it usually meant that that church was in communion with him.

57 شيروان

58 Perhaps 'Spahbad', military governor

59 This reflects the distinction that had always been made between Alexandria (πρὸς Αἴγυπτον/ad Aegyptum) and Egypt cf. H. Idris Bell 'Alexandria ad Aegyptum' *Journal of Roman Studies* 26 (1946): 130ff.

large monastery was built over his grave.

## **42. The earthquake and hail**

In the year 680 of Alexander there was a great earthquake in the East and the West. Large hailstones fell on Constantinople in July.<sup>60</sup> The water overflowed and many people were drowned and some towns submerged. Nicaea was destroyed. Three towns in Persia were destroyed by earthquake. It was a punishment of God to make people obey and repent.

## **43. Ardashir II, brother of Shapur II and of Shapur son of Shapur**

Shapur was king for 70 years, 11 months and several days. His death in 686 of Alexander brought Ardashir to the throne, his heir, who lived in Niniveh. The Magi, who were afraid of him, insulted him to his face. Like his brother, he was hostile to Christians and massacred them. But four years after ascending the throne, there was a military conspiracy to dethrone him. He was replaced by Shapur (III) son of Shapur, in year 15 of Valens. Ardashir died of grief. His successor distributed largesse among the troops. He then targetted his chiefs and imposed heavy taxes on them. He released Christian prisoners, on the grounds that once released they would resume their life and pay their taxes, which would be more useful to the state. The Magi had difficulty discharging these obligations and considered assassinating him. One day, while he was out hunting, he tried sleeping in a tent to take his rest. When he was overcome by sleep, the tent pegs were removed and the tent collapsed on him and killed him. He had reigned for five years.

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<sup>60</sup> Tammuz



#### **44. Valentinian and Gratian his son**

Valens having been burned in the village,<sup>61</sup> the empire was entrusted to Valentinian II, son of Valentinian and Gratian his brother. They administered the empire well. They recalled the fathers exiled under Valens and began persecuting Manichaeans and other supporters of unhealthy doctrines. Then both died in the same year. The reign of Valentinian was one year and a half; that of Gratian fifteen years, twelve with his father and three after his death.

#### **45. Theodosius the Great**

Valens having been burned, Gratian co-opted Theodosius the Great, brave, victorious, kind and sincere. To avenge his brother's death he attacked the barbarians who had killed him. He routed them and returned to Constantinople. In 690 of Alexander the government of the whole empire passed into his hands. He recalled the bishops exiled by Valens and drove out the Arians who had dominated the Church for 40 years, from the sixth year of Constantine, who had exiled Athanasius of Alexandria and Paul of Constantinople, the year of the council in Antioch. In the second year of his reign Theodosius summoned the Council of Constantinople with 115 fathers, the chief of whom was Meletius Patriarch of Antioch and Diodorus bishop of Tarsus. Among the fathers were Helladius of Caesarea, Gregory of Nyssa, Gregory of Nazianze, Amphilochus of Iconium, Amvrose and the archdeacon representing Damasus of Rome. They approved the creed of the 318 and anathematized Macedonius of Rome and his followers, who denied that the Holy Spirit was equal in substance to the Father and Son.

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<sup>61</sup> Ammianus Marcellinus *Rerum Gestarum* has three accounts of Valens' death, and this refers to the second, according to which the Emperor, wounded at the Battle of Adrianople fighting the Goths, was taken to a nearby cottage (*prope ad agrestem casam relatum*), which was subsequently torched by the enemy (Bk 31, 13, 14ff).

In the fifth year of his reign Theodosius ordered all the teachings to be codified in one volume, and this was done.<sup>62</sup> He then placed the book on the altar and said a prayer. He saw in a dream that there was no true faith outside the 318 and the equality of persons.<sup>63</sup> He set fire to the other creeds and drove out adherents of false doctrines. He destroyed pagan temples throughout the empire.

#### 46 How Theodosius obeyed when denied entry into the church

The faith of Theodosius was strong. He had to hasten to Thessalonica, which needed help against the governor who was responsible for justice in the city. Heartlessly and cruelly he had a large number of barbarians march against the city. He killed 7,000 people. When he arrived in the city, he made for the church, but Ambrose denied him entry on the grounds that he had slaughtered so many people and was therefore not allowed to enter the church. Theodosius, profoundly humble and deeply sincere, obeyed Ambrose, showing great respect for the priesthood. Afraid and contrite, he withdrew in tears, wept for the next eight months and abstained from attending Mass and receiving the Eucharist. When Christmas drew near, he begged Rufinus, a friend of Ambrose, to obtain permission for him to attend Mass and receive Communion. Rufinus told Ambrose that Theodosius had been weeping for the last eight months and that because he had been so obedient entry into the church should not be denied to him. Ambrose was resolute and declared he would chase Theodosius away if he came to celebrate the feast. Theodosius went to the door of the church and no further. He prostrated himself, wept and confessed his sins and promised that he would repeat such a crime. The people saw how sincere his faith was. He was allowed into the church. He promised not to punish anyone without first hearing their case for their three days. Inside the church Ambrose said to him: 'It is the best day of your life, my son. You have

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62 This may be a reference to the *Cunctos populos* in *Codex Theodosianus* 16,1-2

63 Ar. 'hypostasis' ?

confessed to human weakness.' The Emperor wanted to be in the sanctuary reserved for Emperors, but Ambrose refused: 'It is not the garb of royalty that confers the priesthood. You have no business here.' The Emperor replied that his peers had had this privilege. Ambrose said that other Patriarchs had flattered the Emperors and that Isaiah had been stripped of his prophetic gift for having allowed Hosia to exceed the limits of his royal dignity. Theodosius said: 'I am ready to obey you.' He left the sanctuary and joined the congregation. He then went to Constantinople, where he also joined the congregation. Nectarius the Patriarch asked him why and Theodosius replied that Ambrose had told him to do so and that he would not disobey him. What a fine thing imperial obedience is !

The wife of Theodosius wore only the roughest fabric next to her skin. She attended the sick in hospitals, emptied their bedpans and washed their wounds.<sup>64</sup> With her servants, she visited all the sick, clothing and giving alms to them. She even went to Antioch to perform charitable works. This annoyed some ill-minded people, who insulted her and drove her from the church. Theodosius heard of this, who disguised his anger for three days. He then sent two generals to Antioch with an large army to torch the city. On their way the generals met a monk in the hillside, who told them not to follow the order: 'Your master is mortal and will soon no longer exist. God made him king of creatures formed in His image to convert the lost, support the mentally infirm and pardon the guilty. He is not king to pursue his own interest and annihilate many people because of only one of his subjects, a mortal like himself. If the Emperor can be upset because his statue of bronze or silver is contemptuously broken, then how much more will God be angry to see His image annihilated. May the Emperor always have God in his soul.'

The two generals wrote to the Emperor about their conversation with the monk. His anger subsided and burning resentment was extinguished. He accepted the word of the monk and recalled the two generals, who returned.

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<sup>64</sup> One can only speculate whether she had any contact with the *Parabalani/Parabolani*, whose activities were so closely regulated by her husband cf. Codex Theodosianus 16, 2:42

When Mar Flavianus the companion of Diodorus, was accused of professing the wrong faith, the Emperor ordered him to travel to the West to defend himself against the accusations. He replied: 'If I am accused because of faith or the impurity of my body or the injustice of my arguments, if I am accused of having taken bribes to distort the truth or having used gold and silver for corruption and defended lies, I will choose equitable judges esteemed by the Emperor and his friends to defend myself in their presence. If people talk about me because of my see or authority, I have no need of them, or anything else.' The Emperor was surprised by his courage, the beauty of his language and contempt for things others seek after. He ordered Flavianus to do his duty and continue to look after his flock.

It happened that Theodosius was attacked by large numbers of vagabonds.<sup>65</sup> This caused him great disquiet. He went to find a certain monk, John the guardian, who lived in the desert and told him about these enemies and his own concern. John told him to trust God and not to fear. The victorious Emperor did not trust the monk. That night he had a dream of this same monk accompanied by Philip. On horseback before the troops, both were saying to him: 'Do not be afraid. God is with you. He will give you victory.' One of his generals had the same dream and he told the Emperor. All were given courage by this. But the head of the large enemy force proved to be arrogant. He said to his people: 'If Theodosius falls into your hands, put him in chains and bring him to me.' At the height of the fray, the enemy was routed. God scattered his troops, destroyed his soldiers and made him fall into the trap he had laid. In chains the enemy was brought before Theodosius, and not the other way around, as he had imagined.

Theodosius died at Antioch aged 66. He had been Emperor for 17 years. His two sons took him to Constantinople, where he was buried. His son Arcadius succeeded him. The Patriarch Necatrius died in the same year. Arcadius appointed a new Patriarch, John Chrysostom,<sup>66</sup> who held the same beliefs as Theodore of

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<sup>65</sup> Nau cites Theodoret 5, 23

<sup>66</sup> Ar. 'of the mouth of gold' فم الذهب

#### **47. Destruction of the Temple of Serapis**

At the time of Theodosius the Great the patriarch of Alexandria, Theophilus, convened an assembly of saints in the desert and asked for their prayers to destroy the temple of Serapis,<sup>68</sup> where the devil had been appearing. After it had been destroyed, a stone with the following inscription was found: 'When the three Ts reign, the temple of Serapis will be destroyed: Theon. Theophilus, Theodosius. The last named destroyed paganism in the empire and, in his deeds, was similar to Constantine. He assembled 150 bishops in the second year of his reign. In the fifth he made Arcadius his co-Emperor and installed him in Constantinople. In the 15th year he made Honorius co-Emperor and installed him in Rome.

Under Valens Constantinople had been troubled by Arians, who elected a clever and sly Patriarch Demophilus. But the orthodox, those of the true belief,<sup>69</sup> elected the wise Evagrius, who opposed the Arians. After his arrival Theodosius exiled Demophilus, who had administered his church for thirteen years. He removed all the Arian bishops and recalled the orthodox from exile. He entrusted the Antioch church to Meletius and had Demophilus replaced by Gregory of Nazianze, who was transferred to the imperial city.

#### **48. The fathers and doctors called Gregory**

Among the Greeks let us mention:

Gregory Thaumaturgus; Gregory bishop of Nyssa, brother of Basil; Gregory the Theologian, bishop of Nazianze; Gregory who converted the Armenians; In Persia

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<sup>67</sup> The name given here is 'interpreter'.

<sup>68</sup> Ar. Sarqis (سرقيس). The story is in Theodoret, Socrates and Sozomen, but Nau thinks this is from a different source.

<sup>69</sup> The word 'orthodox' may not have been generally understood, hence the gloss.

we have Gregory the solitary, who wrote a book on monasticism; Gregory bishop of Nisbis; Gergory the Catholicos, Patriarch of tthe Orient; Gregory the doctor at Seleucia-Ctesiphon; Gregory of the monastery of Gamra, who wrote a commentary on the Psalms.

The story of the Thaumaturgus has already been told.

The bishop of Nyssa was at the Council of the 150, where he spoke the funeral oration of Meletius of Antioch, who had recently died. He finished the Hexameron his brother Basil, wrote a commentary on the Song of Songs and wrote theses on the symbol of the faith. He also commented on the precept of humility, recommended by Our Lord, and other precepts that lead to the kingdom of heaven. He wrote treatises on the creation of man, the soul and the resurrection as well as homilies<sup>70</sup> for feast days. He has also left us an explanatory text on the Creed and numerous letters. In his eighth dissertation Gregory the Theologian proves his worth and his virtue.

The bishop of Nazianze, who was born there, was first an idolatrous pagan. But his mother was Christian, as he tells us in the discourse written about his brother ...<sup>71</sup> His mother, when pregnant with him, was one day exposed to danger on the water. She vowed to baptize her son if she were saved. She kept her promise. The young Gregory visited Basil bishop of Caesarea. He acquired Basil's knowledge and walked in the way of the saints. He wrote 49 treatises on various subjects and 153 works on himself and Arianism. He was greatly inspired by the books of Origen, in his time unrivalled as a commentator. Consecrated as bisop of Nazianze, he was transgerred to Constantinople. But when he knew that the canons did not allow the transfer of bishops, he returned to Nazianze.

Gregory who taught the Armenians and won them over was Greek. He fled to escape from Diocletian and remained in the mountains of Armenia in the service of God.

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70 ܡܬܠܡܐ: followed closely by the Arabic تراجم (translations/prefaces).

71 App. crit. note: Furbûs (فربوس) is a badly written version of Caesarius (قزريوس)

One day the Patricius<sup>72</sup> of Armenia went out hunting around the cave of Gregory and sacrificed to his gods. He was astonished at the solitary life of Gregory and his asceticism. Another time he went hunting with Wassa the Armenian king, who saw Gregory and asked him to sacrifice to the gods. Gregory refused. He had the saint beaten and thrown into a ditch full of insects. The king, no longer in control of himself, began to tear his clothes and bite him. His wife advised him to remove the saint from the ditch. He had him brought out and asked him to pray for him. After Gregory's prayer he was cured and baptized with his entire household. From that time the king was mentioned in the book of the living in church. Gregory's reputation reached the Greeks. At the request<sup>73</sup> of Wassa, Leontius of Caesarea, one of the 318, consecrated him bishop of the Armenians. Wassa and Gregory succeeded in Christianizing the whole of Armenia. They built churches and destroyed pagan temples. When Shapur attacked Wassa, the latter cut his army to ribbons, thanks to the prayers of Gregory.

The Armenians at the Council of Chacedon refused to anathematize Severus and his sect. After Gregory's death the belief of the Armenians had been falsified as well as their faith. On Maundy Thursday a lamb was offered, but like the Jews they gave it salt to eat before killing it.

Gregory, who wrote a book on the the monastic life, was from Susiane, from the town of Nastir. In his book he tells that a monk had a vision of someone approaching him with a lamb: 'Take this ring. You will be master of the pen and write what pleases you.' After thinking about this he had the idea of writing about the monastic life. He saw the sky open. Our Lord and Saviour was sitting on the seat of His glory, the angelic troops before him. The earth moved and the dead were resurrected. He then awoke and went to Nisibis where he was ill for three months. On the point of dying he saw two angels dressed as monks approach him and cure him. It was like the vision of Origen.<sup>74</sup> From Nisibis he went to Edessa. He learned a

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72 Title

73 The likely meaning of this word, which is usually written مسألة

74 اورغيس

great deal there and went to live with the saints on Mt Izla. He served them and became one of them. He later entered a monastery in Cyprus. As he did not speak Greek well, he was made gardener. He stayed in this position for two years, but took advantage of his free time to study Greek with his elders. After some time he learned to speak it correctly. The monks appreciated this, but in an attempt to remove him some of his enemies made a fire in the garden that could not be extinguished. Gregory went to one side from them, prayed and made the sign of the cross over the fire, which went out. The monks named him head of the monastery. He ran the monks and monastery successfully. He then left and returned to the island (جزيرة) Izla.<sup>75</sup> Moses the head of the clerics wrote him a letter reproaching him for going to the Greeks. Gregory replied that he had done so on the instructions of God. He said how the archbishop Epiphanius knew of him and was awaiting his arrival. Gregory wrote a book on the religious state in three parts: sermons, his vision and his letters. Some time later he died and was buried in the cave of Mar Eugene. We will speak of the other saints at places reserved for them in this collection.

#### **49 Flavian and his disciple Diodorus**

This saint was Byzantine<sup>76</sup> When Julian forbade the Christians to study philosophy, Flavian disobeyed him and sacrificed himself. Diodorus was first a disciple of the wise and virtuous Sylvanus, bishop of Tarsus. He studied philosophy in-depth and became so knowledgeable that nobody could defeat him in argument. He went to Antioch to combat Arians and in the dispute revealed the perversity of their doctrine. He showed the error of Eunemius, an enemy of the truth, who denied the soul of the Logos born of Mary, claiming that God had no need of a soul. This teaching follows directly from the error of Arius. But Diodorus revealed the error of this heresiarch and the Emperor banished him and his teacher.

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<sup>75</sup> Read: 'mountain' جبل

<sup>76</sup> رومية



One day in Persia Diodorus heard the office sung as prescribed by Ignatius, the disciple of John the Evangelist. He recalled that he had once heard angels sing like this.

He was consecrated bishop of Tarsus. He wrote three books against Manichaeans, three against Arians and one against Macedonius to prove that the Holy Spirit was consubstantial with the Father and Son. His best work is the refutation of Apollinarius. He wrote seven books in which he refuted Photinus, Marcellus and Paul of Samosata and proved the divinity of Our Lord against these heresiarchs who claimed that, like everyone else, He was not divine. He proved that Christ was God incarnate Who suffered on the cross in His humanity and rose again from the grave in His divinity, opened the graves and gave back life to the dead, made dark the sun and split open rocks. He wrote almost 80 books in which he uncovered perverse teachings. 55 years separated him from the 318 and the 150 fathers.

As the Arians had much support and were strong under Valens, who favoured them, they inflicted much pain on the fathers and forced them into hiding. But as the Emperor was going out to hunt one day, Diodorus decided to confront him and began to dawdle in front of him. The Emperor did not like this and said to him: 'What is the meaning of this ?' Diodorus replied: 'Virgins well guarded were deep inside their apartments. The house caught fire. They came out of their rooms to put the fire out. Thus, I too was in hiding. But the fire of Arius, lit by the Emperor, is now in the Church of the Lord. I have come out to extinguish it.' This made Valens angry.

When Valens banished Eusebius of Samosata, the latter went to the desert. But each time he heard that Arians had destroyed altars and massacred priests, he disguised himself as a soldier, put on a hairpiece and went to ordain priests and deacons according to the needs of his flock. He was recognized by some Arians. They persuaded a merciless female to hurl a large rock from a high terrace at the bishop's

head. As he was dying, he forbade people to take revenge.

When Theodosius gathered the wise and virtuous Isaac, John bishop of ..., <sup>77</sup> Timothy of Alexandria, Gregory of Nyssa, Gregory of Nazianze, Diodorus of Tarsus and Philologos of Laodicea to strengthen and confirm the symbol of the faith, they testified to the orthodoxy of Diodorus, the truth of his doctrine, the breadth of his knowledge and the purity of his body. Theodosius was very fond of him and kept him at Constantinople. Diodorus lived for such a long time that he became very thin. His skin began to stick to his bones. When he died, Chrysostom composed three funeral orations. Theodoret wrote to the troublesome Cyril on the occasion of his disagreement with Mar Nestorius, when he defamed Diodorus: 'Importunate man, you have more than once inflicted hardship on Diodorus, whom you defamed after his death. Yet you know his virtue, knowledge, what he suffered from his enemies. You know that his sufferings were greater than those of John the Baptist, with whom he was compared by Chrysostom. He overturned Valens, Mani, Arius and all who deviated from the truth. Cyril, if you insult Diodorus, it is because he is dead and buried and because of your opposition to Nestorius who followed his path. But Diodorus did not deviate from the true path or avoid punishment or piercing arrows.'<sup>78</sup>

### **50. The heretic monks, Simeon, Hermas, Dadoes and Eusebius known as Eustace**

At this time a group of monks appeared in monasteries near Edessa. They appeared to follow the ways of Antony and Macarius, but secretly they were opposed to them. They claimed that they had reached such a point of spirituality that the Holy Spirit appeared to them and conversed with them. They prayed and kept vigils unceasingly. They were called Mesallians.<sup>79</sup> They believed in fact that after twelve years of prayer and fasting they could move mountains. And anyone who, after

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<sup>77</sup> Lacuna

<sup>78</sup> Cyril was a resolute opponent of Nestorius and had apparently made Diodorus responsible for the Nestorian heresy. It is interesting that the write becomes so passionate here that he addresses Cyril directly.

<sup>79</sup> Those who pray.

twelve years, told a mountain to move and it did not obey, showed signs that he had not reached perfection. He had to start over again with his exercises until he reached his goal.

Mar Theodoret says in his book on the religious life that the head of the Mesallian sect was Eusebius, who used to say to his disciples: 'If you keep only the commandment of prayer, you will receive once again the Holy Spirit, as at baptism, and no longer feels the passions of this earth.' The followers of the sect came from groups of gymnosophists<sup>80</sup> and mendicants. The doctrine was combatted by ...<sup>81</sup> and Diodorus. It was said to come from Beit Garmai, where Eusebius had five disciples. He believed that there was only one God, called Father, Son and Holy Spirit; that the body of Christ was a phantom created by a subtle and spiritual God; that the crucifixion was illusory. He was in favour of common prayer. He believed that dreams came from the Holy Spirit, that there was no benefit in receiving the Eucharist and that the Holy Spirit was with those who did what it said. He did not, however, defend the sins of the flesh. He taught that after the Coming of Christ there would be no defect or sin and that epilepsy was of the Holy Spirit.

## **51. Basil**

On the death of Leontius, one of the 318, Basil was elected bishop of Caesarea. He was imprisoned by Valens for his opposition to Arianism. But the son of the Emperor fell ill. The empress Ruminica set the bishop free and, with her husband, asked him to cure her son. The saint said: 'He will become healthy when he is baptized by the orthodox.' The Emperor did not agree. The child was baptized by Arians and died.

Basil has left us, among other works, a book on the Hexameron, which explains the remarkable psalms of the prophet David, several works on prayer and fasting, work

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<sup>80</sup> Presumably of Indian origin or influenced by Indians. They are mentioned in an essay attributed to Ambrose *De Moribus Brahmanorum*

<sup>81</sup> The text reads: المونابى. Sher suggests Epiphanius.

on the monastic rule, letters and polemics with Eunomius.

When Gregory was transferred, at the time of Theodosius, from Constantinople, he was succeeded by Maximus. The latter, at first orthodox, soon became heretical. At the council of the 150 the fathers recognized him for what he was, deposed him and made Nectarius the praetor his successor. It was decided in the council that Constantinople would be second to Rome. Gregory of Nazianze died and was succeeded by Eulalius.

The brothers of Basil, Gregory of Nyssa and Peter of Sebaste, followed in his footsteps and attended the council of 150.

## **52. The heretic Macedonius, Patriarch of Constantinople.**

This heresiarch taught that the Holy Spirit had been created. Several bishops gathered together because of him and stated their objections. None was able to change his mind or close his mouth. Having lost their patience they tried to involve Theodore of Mopsuestia, disciple of Diodorus, in their debates, to which they brought him. When Macedonius heard his arguments, he was afraid that Theodore would expose the perversity of his teaching and destroy it. He refused to enter into discussion with them: 'I am Patriarch. I do not discuss with a priest.' The 150 fathers went to the church and made Theodore a bishop that night. As they laid hands on him they said in unison: 'The Holy Spirit has perfected Theodore the priest by consecrating him bishop for the Church of God.' On the following day they summoned him, cross in hand and head covered with veil and mitre. He entered into discussion with Macedonius, defeated him and revealed his perversity and error. The assembly agreed to anathematize and expel him. The hymn 'Father, Son and Holy Spirit with one kingdom only' <sup>82</sup>was composed. This took place about

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<sup>82</sup> Arabic text seems to be some attempt to render the Syriac.

seventy years after the council of the 318 and one hundred years after Ephesus.<sup>83</sup> He had formerly taught that the Holy Spirit was not consubstantial, but temporal. He wrote to Antioch not to name the Holy Spirit as consubstantial. The people of Antioch had no bishop. They chose Meletius, a just, pure and orthodox man. Consecrated bishop, he began to preach the consubstantiality of the three: 'We acknowledge and confess three hypostases that have to be worshipped simultaneously because they have the same substance. When we worship the Father and the Son, we also worship the Holy Spirit.' The congregation did not understand. He then stretched out his hand: 'Look at my hand, it has only one essence,<sup>84</sup> but several names.' He then stretched out three fingers and said: 'These fingers, do they have three substances or one ?' He then folded two of his fingers and left one stretched out and added: 'The essence of the stretched out finger, is it different from the folded fingers ?' The answer was 'no'. He then folded the stretched out finger and unfolded the other two and said: 'Are these two different from the other one ?' 'No, not all.' 'It is the same with the essence of the three hypostases: one essence in the three hypostases.'<sup>85</sup> As soon as the enemies of truth heard this, they blocked their ears so as not to hear the word that the Holy Spirit had put into the saint's mouth. They made him come down from the pulpit where he was standing, expelled him from the bishopric and removed him from the priesthood. In his place they chose another bishop who favoured their teaching. These heretics, at baptism, would put the head right down to the chest, on the grounds that the seat of the soul is in the head and the heart and that it alone needs purification. The other parts of the body, especially the genitals of men and women, should not be baptized, for they polluted it.

The Emperor had asked Eusebius bishop of Samosata to profess the same doctrine as Macedonius the Patriarch and said to a noble: 'If he does not obey, cut his right hand off.' But the bishop said: 'I will never break the seal of the doctrine entrusted to me by the spiritual fathers unless they break it themselves. Even if all my limbs

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83 If the preposition is correct (بعد), the dates have to be 395 AD and 531 AD.

84 Ar. جوهري

85 The gifted Briton Patrick, in Ireland, doubtless found the shamrock less cumbersome as a instructional device.

are hacked off.' When the Emperor heard this, he was full of admiration and gave instructions that he was not to be brought before him again.

### **53. Mar Theodore of Mopsuestia**

The virtues of this sage among scholars, outstanding in virtues that cannot be counted ! His incomparable wisdom was inconceivable ! Let us thank God that He gave an unknown genius in arguing and explaining the Scriptures.

He was born in Antioch to rich parents. When he was fifteen, he began studying philosophy and the natural sciences and examining what was written in the books he read in order to explain them. He was guided by the Holy Spirit to become a master of exegesis. He had a keen love of the Holy Spirit, like a lover. He became a disciple of Basil the Great and wanted the monastic life. The monks, however, refused, on the following grounds: he was too young, they did not want to anger his father, the number of monks in the monastery was limited, they wanted to test his belief and patience. But he remained a whole year at the gate of the monastery, tirelessly and unceasingly praising God, reciting Scripture which he then explained. The monks saw his worth and let him in. He stayed for twenty-one years serving the wise and virtuous father Flavian and Mar Diodorus, his knowledge increasing. Inspired by the Holy Spirit that Theodore was an incomparable exegete, these two fathers asked him to write a commentary on the Scripture. He wrote a just and well-reasoned work.

The bishops, his neighbours and those far away, eagerly wished to hear him speak and benefit from his knowledge. Those who had spent time with him were sad to leave.

When Macedonius falsified the true doctrine, claiming that the Holy Spirit had been created and did not have the same essence as the Father and the Son, he asked the fathers to show him the passage of Scripture that affirms that the Holy Spirit is eternal and consubstantial with the Father. If they could not find it, they would have to profess his doctrine. Nobody could find any proof that would alleviate the distress of their soul. They all went to Theodore and begged him to elucidate the matter, to relieve them and let the congregation see the shining light of truth. Macedonius and his followers realized this, and withdrew their challenge to avoid embarrassment. They refused to discuss the matter with Theodore on the grounds that he was a mere priest. By common consent Theodore was consecrated bishop.

Then the saint went to a city where he found an idol, named Mopsos. The city was named after it and was called Mopsuestia. As he entered the city he was seized by some who said: 'You have to worship our god whom we can see. While you invite us to worship your crucified god, he performs miracles and prodigies for us.' The saint was polite to them and not afraid of them. When they saw that he was repulsing their invitation to worship, they tried to place the idol in the inner part of the altar. A high structure in front concealed the idol. The saint went up to the altar, but he smelt a foul smell and envisaged a horrible image of the idol. He began to pray and made a sign of the cross on the wall. The wall split into two and the idol leant out, turned towards the saint, who snatched it and hurled it into the fire. Most people in the city converted.

More spectacular prodigies were performed by him: a Jew used to go to listen to his sermons and wanted to be baptized. One day, unable to go, he died suddenly. After his burial, the saint learned of this and was distressed that he had not baptized him sooner. Trusting in God he went the grave with some people. He prostrated himself and began to pray to Our Lord to resurrect the Jew and purify him for baptism in the name of the consubstantial Trinity. He then ordered the body to be exhumed. The dead man arose and walked out of the burial pit. The saint had water brought and baptized him: 'Do you want to return to the grave and its peace or remain on

earth with its troubles ?' The Jew preferred death to life. Theodore blessed him, the dead man went to sleep, the saint buried him and left.

Nobody can properly describe the extraordinary virtues of this saint. Cyril, before combatting the virtuous Nestorius, said: 'Theodore is like pure gold.' But overcome by a demon the same Cyril went back on his word, like a dog returning to his vomit.<sup>86</sup> When he reached the exegesis of passage in the Epistles of Paul: 'Are we not allowed to eat and drink or associate with a sister who serves us like the other apostles, the brothers of the Lord and Cephas ?' The saint thought that, in the testimony of some, Paul was putting his word into practice. Immediately after this thought, the Holy Spirit deprived him of grace. He could no longer explain a word or find any sense in it. He then gave himself up to fasting and vigils, praying to God to restore to him the grace that he had lost. Overcome by grief, he prostrated himself on the ground and took refuge in the grave of the virtuous Thecla, who had accompanied the apostles on their travels, performing miracles and baptizing women. He threw himself on the tomb and asked her to pray to Paul to forgive the error he had committed in spirit. In a dream he saw seated on a chair next to the grave a venerable old man with white hair and of remarkable beauty. He also saw the saint standing beside him, begging him to release Theodore. 'After long prayers, said Theodore, the old man came up to me and blessed my heart and gave me 14 keys, saying: "These keys open any lock." I then woke up and everything I wanted was open to me, and I had ideas that I had never had before and wrote a commentary on the 14 epistles of Paul.'

Theodosius considered himself fortunate when he saw Theodore was able to give a reasoned explanation to all the difficult questions he posed. He therefore asked Theodore to write a commentary on the Epistles. Alipha<sup>87</sup> asked him to write a commentary on the Pentateuch, which he did in three volumes. Babai asked him to write a commentary on Samuel and Cedron one on David, which he did in three volumes. He also wrote commentaries on the twelve prophets, at the request of Mar Toubas: on Ecclesiastes for Marphoria; Acts of the Apostles for Eusia; Epistle to the

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<sup>86</sup> Prov. 26,11

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Romans for Athanasius; Corinthians for Theodore; Second Corinthians and Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians for Tatalis; the two Thessalonians for James; the two to Philemon and Hebrews for Hendatus, for whom he also wrote a treatise on perfection and the priesthood. Maurice asked him to write a commentary on Timothy. Others asked him for various commentaries. He interpreted the Book of Job, the Gospels and explained the symbol of the 318 and the Mass; the subjects of his books are the humanity of Jesus, the perfect way, refuting those who think that sin inheres in human nature, the Holy Spirit, the priesthood, refuting the Magi, letters called 'pearls', refuting Eumenius and Apollinarius, the Antichrist, letter to a renegade, exposition of the Arian doctrine and an attack on those who see only the parabolic side when reading books. He refused no request and never wrote without producing a perfect explanation. His commentaries are on the Gospels, Jeremiah, Daniel, Ezekiel. He wrote a book refuting all attempts at novelty, filled with such excellent things that he called it the Book of Pearls, because it resembles well-ordered precious pearls. This was the achievement of 55 years of study devoted to explaining the Scriptures and fighting heretics. When God called him, he was buried near the blessed Thecla.

Theodore had many disciples, including

#### 54 Mar Ephrem the Syrian prophet

According to the account of Simeon of Samosata, who was a disciple of Ephrem from boyhood to old age, Ephrem's father was from Nisibis and his mother from Amid. His father's name was Mishaq, a priest of Abizal. His father was angry that his son was in the service of Christian called John. He struck his son, saying: 'The god I serve, I serve him for your sake. I ask him to forgive your errors, to increase your worth and extend your name, while you follow the error of the Christians.' The devil spoke to his servant from inside the idol: 'I see that you serve me devotedly. You have been addressing prayers to me on his behalf, but I have no chance of

possessing him. He the enemy of me and people like me.' The wicked father said to his blessed son: 'Remove yourself from me and go where you will. You have angered the gods with your hostility, injustice and impiety.' Mar Ephrem was glad when he heard this. He took the opportunity to go to the church, where he was baptized at the age of eighteen. The saint who baptized him taught him the Psalms. When Christian persecutions began, Ephrem left for Amid and withdrew to Edessa. A monk saw him and said: 'Go into a monastery and learn the monastic rule.' He went and put himself in the service of an aged monk, who was very ascetic. He stayed with him for a year.

Some people of learning say that Mar Ephrem was dull and was unable to retain anything he had learned. When the children were reading and learning to memorize, they made fun of him and said: 'Tell us something that we may hear it.' Ephrem became sad, wept and prayed to God unceasingly that He might open his intelligence and disperse the clouds of darkness. One day, as he was going to draw water for his master, he saw very clean water trickling out of a rock. He looked up and said: 'Lord, I beg you by the power that has worn down this rock and the goodness that has made this stone wet to water the dryness of my heart, mollify the hardness of my spirit and open up my intelligence to spread knowledge of You and make it well-known among Your creatures so that they may be moved to love and obey and You.' That night Ephrem saw angels come down from heaven, holding a book written on both sides<sup>88</sup> and heard them say to each other: 'To whom should this book be given?' One replied: 'Ephrem, for he will learn ...'<sup>89</sup>

Basil sent to this individual<sup>90</sup> to tell Ephrem to attend him. Basil's envoy took him by the hand and said to him: 'Come with me to the Patriarch.' Ephrem: 'I am a poor man covered in nothing but a bundle of rags of hideous appearance. The Patriarch is splendid, dressed in silk and purple. What does he want with me?' The servant took him by force and led him to the Patriarch, who greeted him deferentially, while

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88 Seems to suggest a papyrus roll on which writing is visible on the horizontal and vertical fibres.

89 App. crit. says هنا ورقة ساقطة (here paper missing)

90 شخص

Ephrem lowered his head and dared not raise it. The Patriarch said: 'My brother, who are you ? Where do you come from ? Tell me about yourself. I saw two angels clothed in garments of fire put a similar garment on you and place themselves at your side. I heard you say twice: 'Good.'<sup>91</sup> But I was speaking in Greek. How did you understand me. You look like a Syrian.' Ephrem said: ' I am a foreigner and poor. You are a wealthy and powerful prince. Let me go.' Basil incined his head: 'I will not raise my head again until you tell me who you are. I beg you, by Christ Our Lord, Who has given you this dignity and virtue, to tell me who you are.' Basil insistently begged him. Because Ephrem did not understand Greek, he wept and said: 'I am Ephrem the Syrian.' Basil threw himself about his neck, embraced him closely and covered him with kisses. He then dismissed his attendants and withdrew with Ephrem. 'Why did you say εὖ twice when you do not understand Greek ? People ususally say it only once.' Ephem replied: 'I saw the Holy Spirit in the form a white dove whisper in your ear waht your tongue.' Basil said: ' Mar Ephrem, if you were Basil and I had been Ephrem, I would assuredly have seen what God has made you worthy of and what He has destined you for.' <sup>92</sup>

Basil happily spend several days with him. But it happened that a large number of people gathered around them. Basil began to preach on the six days of creation, with such eloquence that his audience was astonished. Ephrem felt great joy and wondered at the spirituality of his words. He later made his farewell and departed for Edessa.

On his way he was overcome by a group of heretics, who entered into a discussion with him. He scattered them, tore up their books and refuted their arguments. But there was a bold young man among them. He struck Ephreme so hard that he fell to the ground. After recovering he resumed his journey. The heretics were not far away when a large viper bit the young man who had struck Ephrem. He was in such pain that some of his comapnion ran to Ephrem and begged to have pity on this ignoramus and the weakness of his poor mother. Ephrem went with them and by

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91 εὖ

92 In my view this entire episode has something of the surreal about it

the time he arrived, the young man was dead. He prostrated himself and prayed for a long time that God would display His goodness and power to those who obeyed Him. He made the sign of the cross, took his hand, resurrected him and rejoined him with his companions. He then wept over their great impiety. Many converted to the true faith.

On entering Edessa Ephrem found nine different doctrines, one of them true, the others faulty. He combatted the adherents of these doctrines. He was zealous against the followers of Mani, Arius, and Bardesan. He combatted and confounded them.

When he became Patriarch Basil sent friends to find Ephrem. He wanted to consecrate him bishop of one of the provinces: 'If you find a man clothed in rags, short, bald, big head, short beard, try to bring him here to me. Make sure he does not run away.' When they arrived in Edessa, the messengers asked about Ephrem. They were taken to him. When Ephrem saw them, he knew why they had come. He took a loaf of bread, threw an assemblage of rags retrieved from a garbage dump around his shoulder. He began to run in the streets, biting the loaf. The messengers saw him and thought he was mad. They dismissed him: 'He is mad. We should not bring him before the Patriarch. He would make us feel ashamed if we brought him someone like this.' They left and went back to the Patriarch and told him of the unworthy condition of this man. He said: 'Idiots ! morons ! A pearl of great value has escaped you. You have lost a mine of learning and knowledge.'

There is much to say about his virtues and extensive knowledge. The poems he wrote are plaintive, humble, pious, and touching. Their sadness surpasses the lamentations of Jeremiah- He had no time for secular things. His tenderness and humility urged him to decline the honours of the mighty, of which he was quite worthy. He ate only barley bread and salt. His attire was made up of rags from garbage heaps. He was only a deacon when he might have been the greatest of Patriarchs, most worthy of the honour and estimation of his fellow man. In a word,

he was beyond all the scholars in knowledge and sages in wisdom. The monastic life he led, his morals and passion for prayer cannot be described. Huanisho bar Sroshoi, bishop of Hira, in his praise: 'Ocean of knowledge, who can describe the abundance of your treasures ? Mine of treasures, who can describe the beauty of your words ? Who does think of being silent when your name is spoken in a gathering ? Who does not beg God with great passion not to give him what He gave you ? Who does not recall how charitable God was to you and does not hope for divine mercy ? Let the scholars be silent. Let Ephrem speak. Let the orators remain silent from astonishment and fear. Let Ephrem make his voice hear an intoxicate us with his sublime word.

It is said in certain histories that Bardesanes composed a gospel that disagreed with that of Our Lord, that he seduced spirits whose faith was broken and intelligence suffering from doubt. He corrupted the hearts of many people with his gospel. When he died, the Church was released from him and his wickedness. Ephrem tried to get hold of the book and asked his sister, who promised it to him. But the devil, the friend of corruption persuaded her to try to seduce Ephrem. Ephrem said to her: 'First, give me the book and I will sleep next to you as you wish.' She said: 'Swear by Christ that you will do this and give it back to me after you have read it.' He promised. She gave him the book. He took it and glued all the pages together and pressed them firmly together. He then took his cloak and went out into the street with her. In broad daylight he stretched his cloak on the street and said: 'I am yours. Lie down here so that I can fulfil my promise.' She said: 'Is there anyone in the world who would perform the conjugal act with his wife in public, let alone another woman ?' The saint said to her: 'So, you are unable to consent. I have kept my promise. You are the one who wishes to renounce it.' She left. God had triumphed over the devil.

55 Luliana, son of Barmala

This man imitated Ephrem by clothing himself like Ephrem. He wore the girde of

truth and justice, ate only plants like Elijah, who received his food from a crow. Like Elija he lived in the Carmel valley and on the riverbank. This man saw a vision of Julian the Apostate, the criminal who declared war on Christ, asking the devil for troops to annihilate the faithful. For sixteen days he prayed fervently unceasingly to Our Lord and Saviour. He begged Him to display His power against his enemy, to protect the Christians and avert the persecution planned by Julian. He never stopped praying and atalking to the Lord so that He would strike the Apostate with an arrow of vengeance and deliver His flock from persecution, When he was old and feeble, he withdrew to a widow with an only child. He received hospitality and ate with her. The devil, enemy of good works, enviously planned to afflict and harm him. He threw the boy into a deep well. The mother began to cry: 'My son is dead. I hvave lost my only child.' The saint was not distrubed because he hoped, with the help of God, to save the child. He went to the well, vut the child was entirely covered with water. The saint made the sign of the cross of Christ, Whose law he had always followed, and the water spewed up the boy as the sea had spewed up the axe, thanks to the prayer of Elisha.<sup>93</sup> St Luliana stretched forth his hand retrieved the smiling child from the clutches of death. The boy was asked why he was smiling: 'I was at the bottom of the well. This old man here, I saw him smiling as he stretched out his hand and pulled me out of the water. When I saw him smilig, I began to smile too.'

These are just some of the incidents of the saint's life. May his prayers help to protect us and deliver us from evil.

## 56 Epiphanius the archbishop

This remarkable man was oroginally a Jew. When his father died, he left him his entire patrimony, a donkey. His mother was still alive when he found himself obliged to sell the animal. He took it market to sell it. Young Epiphanius was very astute. The buyers tried to drive the price down, but an honest monk saw him and took pity on him. God revealed to the monk what the boy was one day to become.

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<sup>93</sup> 2 Kings 6, 1ff.

He bought the animal for 4 gold pieces, which he weighed<sup>94</sup> and gave the donkey back to Epiphanius: 'Spend this money to support your mother and yourself. Keep the animal.' The young man was astonished at the conduct of the monk and went away happy. When the money had gone, he once again had to sell the donkey. He took it to market where he met the monk and told him what had happened. 'I see that you are intelligent and astute. Why do you not become a Christian ?' 'I will not abandon the worship of One God, the Law of Moses and the prophets to follow a God in three persons, one of whom was crucified and buried.' The monk said to him: 'Shall I show you the power of the crucifixion ?' When Epiphanius agreed, the monk called the donkey: 'In the name Christ killed by the Jews, die instantly.' The animal died and Epiphanius burst into tears. The monk asked him not to cry but recite over the dead animal any words you like from Moses or the prophets. If the animal arises, you are right to adhere to Judaism. The boy read from the Pentateuch and the prophets until he could read no more. The animal remained motionless. The monk then said: 'In the name of Christ crucified by the Jews, arise.' The donkey arose instantly. When the boy saw this miracle, he took the animal back to his mother. She died some time later. He buried her and returned to the monk, who baptized him, removing the stain of Judaism and converting him from falsehood to truth. The young man left and went to live in solitude, living a life of severe mortification and entering a monastery. God granted him knowledge of secrets and the power to perform miracles. One day a caravan was passing by. It had wine but no water. The virtuous Epiphanius, seeing the distress of the caravan, made the sign of the cross over the jars containing the wine and turned it into the purest water. The caravan quenched its thirst and the animals were watered. But one jar remained unopened. When it was opened, it was found to contain wine. Our Lord converted water into wine and his disciple wine into water.

When the saint's reputation began to spread, he was chosen for a bishopric. After his consecration, he performed more miracles. One of his flock was a moneylender who had become very rich. The saint forbade him to practise usury, but he did not listen. Some time later he used his money to buy wheat, which he put into several

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94 Standard market practice

vessels. The saint made the sign of the cross over the vessels and they were shipwrecked. The bishop thanked God for this, for having purified the usurer's house of injustice. News of the shipwreck spread rapidly when the man of God was praising heaven.

One of the bishop's archdeacons was badly behaved. The bishop had ordered him several times to improve his behaviour, but he refused. The bishop became stricter, and the archdeacon began to plot his death but was unsuccessful. One day a crow appeared and began to crow. To provoke the bishop the archdeacon asked him what it meant. 'He is announcing death before the celebration of the Mass,' was the reply. And the archdeacon died before the holy sacrifice. The bishop then went to Jerusalem,<sup>95</sup> where people were suffering from a great famine. He asked the Patriarch to lend him vessels of gold and silver that he might offer like them. The Patriarch lent them to him. He sold them and spent the money on alleviating the plight of the widows and orphans. After some time the Patriarch demanded the return of the vessels and finally excommunicated the bishop, who made the sign of the cross and rendered the Patriarch blind. He then said to the poor, to whom he had given the money: 'I trust that Christ will enrich you again and you can pay back the Patriarch.' This in fact happened, and they were able to repay the Patriarch what they had taken from him.

Epiphanius was bishop for thirty five years. His was a spiritual life, albeit imprisoned in a corporeal shell. Every time he baptized, ordained a priest or deacon or consecrated a bishop, the Holy Spirit could be seen hovering about his work.

## 57 The martyrs and eminent people of this time

Damasus of Rome; Ambrose of Milan; Basil of Caesarea; Diymus the Blind, the Alexandrian logician, who fought the Arians; the two martyrs Miles and Qardah;

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<sup>95</sup> Arabic name: بيت المقدس



Gregory of Nyssa; Rabban Sallita, buried at Awana opposite Balad, at the place known as al Duweir; Jovian the pious Emperor; Macarius the ascete, who spent sixty years in the desert of Egypt; Macarius of Alexandria; their companions exiled by Valens, empero of the Romans; Peter the brother of Cyprian ... ; Cyprian bishop of Africa; Anba Evagrius the monk, disciple of Oulogos, whose feast is the 27th November.

#### 58 the Patriarch Tumarsa, the twelfth Catholicos

The Church remained without a head from the 39th year of Shapur until the accession of Bahrâm. Shapur had in fact prevented the nomination another Catholicos after the martyrdom of Barba'shemin. But under Bahrâm Tumarsa the Nabatean showed himself devoted and zealous for the truth. He was consecrated Catholicos. He patiently tolerated the persecution unleashed on him by the Magi, consecrated bishops and sent them abroad. He himself undertook pastoral work throughtout the country. He constructed new churches and restored old ones to their former splendour with the help of his servant Bakhtisho, who was later martyred. After eight years as Patriarch Tumarsa died.

#### 59 Bahrâm surnamed Farmanshah

At the time of Theodosius, Bahrâm son of Shapur, surnamed Farmanshah, ascended the throne of Persia. He decided to avenge his father. At the beginning of his reign he he was beneficent and kind to the poor. Once assured of power he ordered the lords of his kingdom to build walls and citadels at their own expense. He put his servant Bakhtisho to death for his faith in Christ. The subjects of his empire quickly felt the yoke that he burdened them with. They plotted his death. One day, when out with a servant to walk on the hill adjoining the land of Daskart. he was followed by soldiers and realized their intention. As he was strong, he asked his servant for an arrow to shoot at them. But the soldiers managed to wait for him and kill him on this hill. He was on the throne for ten years and eighteen days.

He was from Deir Quni. His mother was immoral. It is a wonder that such a debauched woman gave birth to a saint. As with Jephthe, who saved the Israelites from Ammon. From his birth 'Abda was thrown at the church by his mother. Christians took care of him and brought him up. He did well in the village school. He was ordained priest and built a large monastery and a comprehensive school,<sup>96</sup> where every subject was taught. At that time there was no other monastery in the land of the Nabat. It was a successful school, with 60 alumni, including Ahai and Iahbalaha, each one of whom was Catholicos. Mar 'Abda was well-known for his purity. He travelled the country incessantly, baptizing Aramaeans. He then went to the village of Tella, near the river Serser, and left the monks of Sliba.

One day, the students<sup>97</sup> in the monastery ran out of bread. He took a little and blessed it, like his Master, and fed them with it for two days, as well as guests. On the third day the faithful sent them flour.

Mar 'Abda did not eat cooked food for seven years. He ate dry bread and ashes.<sup>98</sup> One day when he was crossing Seleucia-Ctesiphon he was seized by the Magi and imprisoned, but escaped from prison with God's help.

The Marcionites had spread their magic among Christians. Mar 'Abda reconverted them. The students of his felt no need to go to Edessa. The Marcionites were constantly trying to kill him. But their plots were foiled by Almighty God. The cathoicos Ahai wrote of the life of the saint that it was distinguished by its virtues.

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<sup>96</sup> I can hardly resist using this 'English' term, which was introduced there in the 1960s. It is of course an anachronism.

<sup>97</sup> Arabic form of the Greek: الاسكولانيين

<sup>98</sup> Possibly left over from the baking process.

When the churches in Persia were destroyed and Christians massacred, a cross rose up on the earth in the form of a tree. It happened near a village called Tella on the Serser.

A similar thing happened in the time of Claudius and his wife Christa.<sup>99</sup> This miracle was to frustrate the Jews who wished to hide the cross. But the cross revived a dead man. The Magi were astonished at this. They tried in vain to conceal the miracle. This was told to a Christian called Sliba son of Usia, headman of the region. He bought the land and built a sanctuary on the site of the apparition. Monks flocked there from all over. Sliba took charge of the community. The place was called the monastery of Sliba. People in the Nabatean countries heard of it.

Mar 'Abda, founder of the school of Deir Quni, went to the site, performed miracles and converted many. He taught that there was no reason to doubt that cross could emerge from the ground and pointed to the parallel that had in the time of Constantine three hundred years after the Jews had secreted the cross. The image of the cross appeared in the sky, at the time of the savage persecutions of Diocletian, Maximian. When Helena had the cross dug up, it exuded a pleasant fragrance. Danile son of Mariam relates that a luminous cross for several days while the blessed Barshaba was being martyred. Another cross appeared on the cross on which Nathaniel was martyred. A myrtle tree appeared in the spot where Aithalaha was martyred. The sick of Nuhadra took pieces of it and recovered their health. Five years. Five years later the Magi, having heard of it, cut it down. In this way God let the cross appear during the Persian domination in which many Christians were killed in order to strengthen the hearts of the Christians and the belief of the faithful throughout the empire.

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<sup>99</sup> Footnote: Protonice

62 'Abdisho',  
who built a monastery near Hira

Saint 'Abdisho', from a village called Arpheluna in Maisan, went to Deir Quni, near Mar 'Abda. His study at school was extensive. One day, he went to the Tigris to draw water, which was far from the monastery. The descent to the river was not easy. He found women drawing water. They implored him to fill their jars, and he did. Back in the monastery Mar 'Abda reproved him for having taken so long. 'Abdisho' told him why. Mar 'Abda then said: 'If you do things because people implore you, I implore to go and stand in the middle of this oven. The blessed 'Abdisho' made the sign of the cross over his body and the fire and went into the oven and stood there on sight of all the others. The flames abated forthwith and consumed none of his garments. Following this miracle, he fled from the monastery and returned to his native country. He built a monastery there, which many joined. His family and relatives came to visit him all the time. For this reason he left the monastery and went to Baksays, near the village of Beit 'Arbi. Bahrâm Farmanshah, on his way back from Seleucia-Ctesiphon, passed by the village and was struck by the respect shown by so many for the saint, who also left this place and withdrew to Maisan where he Christianized Rimiun and the neighbouring country,

His fame reached the Catholicos Tumarsa, who consecrated him bishop of Deir Muharaq. The people of the province were rebels. 'Abdisho' brought them back to the right path by his kindness and good administration. Later they maltreated him. He left them his cape and his stick and one night left for the island of Yamama and Bahrain. He led a solitary life there and baptized the inhabitants. He then built a monastery there. One day, a person possessed by the devil was brought to him and he cured the person. The demon said: 'You have driven me out ? Where do you want me to go ?' The saint gave him a stone and told him to go to the deserts of the son of Isma'il. The demon did so and, on his return, told the saint: 'I took the stone where you told me and put it three miles from the town of Hira at the entrance to the

desert.' 'Abdisho' said: 'Stay here until I have checked what you say.' That night he had a vision to go to the place and build a monastery there. The saint left the island known today as Ramath, 18 parasangs from Ubila and made for Hira, where he built a monastery. His fame spread far and wide and people began to gather around him. The demon meanwhile remained imprisoned on the island. People hear him crying out: ' Lord, is he not coming ? How long do I have to stay here ?' The saint then returned to his monastery at Maisan to baptize his children. It was there that he died.

### 63 Qayuma, 13th Catholicos

Tumarsa was succeeded as Catholicos by Qayoma in the ninth year of Bahrâm. He was old, but despite his age and feebleness he continued to administer his pastoral duties until the accession of the impious Yazdgerd. He chose Isaac, relative of Turmarsa, as Catholicos in his place. And, by agreement with the fathers and the faithful, he left the administration to him.

Qayoma kept to his cell: 'As God gives his subjects peace and shelters them from exile and peace, one should entrust the management of their affairs to a younger man who is able to direct and govern them as is fitting.' He died in the third year of Yazdgerd.

### 64 Arcadius and Honorius

Theodosius was succeeded by his sons Arcadius and Honorius. They managed the empire miraculously well and followed their father. They were baptized by Epiphanius bishop of Cyprus and brought up by Abba Arsenius, famed for his worth and virtue.

Epiphanius was born a Jew, but God chose him as He had chosen Paul and

surrounded him with a blinding light. He was baptized at the age of seventeen and At sixty he was consecrated bishop. He wrote treatises, homilies on prayer and fasting. He died aged 115. He had a companion called Natira, disciple of Silvanus, who lived near Mount Sinai. Timothy bishop of Alexandria, consecrated Natira bishop of Oyxrhynchus<sup>100</sup> When he was living alone, Natira took some care of his body. But after becoming a bishop his life became more austere. His disciple wanted to know why. 'When I was in the desert, I took care of my body that it might not become ill. But now that I am back in the world, I must mortify my flesh so as not to succumb to the numerous temptations.' The saint joined Epiphanius in curing the sick and expelling demons.

Abba Arsenius was related to Theodosius. He had a thousand servants and a large fortune. But he continually asked God to show him the way to live. One day at home he heard a voice from heaven: 'Arsenius, flee from man and you will live.' So he left everything he had and withdrew to the desert of Egypt. He had a fine figure and long beard. When he entered the church, he placed himself behind a column to escape the attention of others. On Saturday evening he stood in the church, with his back to the sun and hands to heaven. He remained like this, without moving, until Sunday. Because of fatigue his skin became dessicated on his bones. His eyelashes fell out. But his face shone like that of an angel. He was finally struck by an illness in the desert and was too feeble to do anything. Our Lord, in His goodness, let him leave this transient world and occupy one of the best places in the world to come. He was 112 when he died: 40 years on the throne, 60 in the desert and hills of Egypt, 10 near Alexandria and 2 in Troa, where he died. May his prayers protect the faithful.

## 65 King Yazdgerd

Bahrâm was succeeded by the impious Yazdgerd, his brother. He made a treaty with the Romans and married the daughter of the king of the Hephtaristes. He then looked for his brother's killer. He was unyielding with the princes in his kingdom

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<sup>100</sup>Ar. احسويرحوس

and tried to humiliate them. Some of his friends advised him against this: 'The building cannot stand without a foundation. You have maltreated the princes in your kingdom and thus made them bitter rather than joyful. What do you hope to achieve ?' The king replied: 'You have killed two kings, so you deserve this treatment. If you follow the right path, I will be more considerate.' His subjects were suitably fearful of him and his authority was reinforced.

## 66 Isaac 14th Catholicos

This father was good, virtuous, knowledgeable, merciful, a miracle-worker, devoted to prayer and fasting. He managed the affairs of his people well. Arcadius, Emperor of the Romans, learned of the Christian persecution in Persia and wrote to Yazdgerd: 'If God has placed royal power in our hands, it is not so that we can secure our own personal well-being but so that we can govern with justice, chastize the oppressor and reward benefactors according to their merit. You do not worship God, but still He has allotted to you a large enough kingdom. He has ... He has raised you to the throne. It is therefore not right the Christians of your empire be so maltreated, robbed and and killed. If it is true that this happens most of the time without your knowledge, it is no less true that your people do this always with the aim of pressuring them and taking what belongs to them. Know that this makes God angry with you and people hateful of you. In fact, when men come to know what happens to their fellows, they disapprove and find it monstrous. Those people would find it more profitable to pursue the enemy and introduce reform into the empire.' He then asked him to show greater favour to Christians to stop the persecution and allow them to rebuild their churches.

The letter was brought to Yazdgerd, who was sick, by Marutha bishop of Maiferqat. It was sent with him by the Emperor in the hope of making him feel better. Yazdgerd felt great joy when he received the letter, replied to what he asked and sent him gifts. The persecution came to an end and there was peace. Yazdgerd then

wrote to Isaac the Catholicos to calm and reassure him.

Isaac benefited from the presence of Marutha to convene a synod to to organize the eastern church, like the one that had happened in the west. Marutha presented the letters of the western bishops to Yazdgerd, in which they asked him to convene the bishops and metropolitans at Seleucia-Ctesiphon. Yazdgerd agreed and was happy with the agreement between the two empires. He then wrote to his people and told them to send their provincial bishops to Seleucia-Ctesiphon. In the eleventh year of his reign at Christmas 40 metropolitans assembled at Seleucia. The letter of the western bishops was read aloud, and they accepted it immediately. In the presence of the fathers Isaac and Margutha drew up 22 canons for the needs of the Church. And all, of their own free will, gave their agreement, signed the canons and decreed that it was necessary to conform with them in future. Thus, schism was avoided and peace re-established. Isaac died in year 12 of Yazdgerd. He has been Patriarch for eleven years.

## 67 John Chrysostom

Nectarius was Patriarch of Constantinople for 17 years. When he died, Arcadius summoned a man called John 'Golden Mouth' because of his eloquence to be Patriarch. He was a relative of Theodore of Mopsuestia. He embraced the monastic life in a monastery near Antioch, the home of Flavian and Diodorus the exegete.

He studied with Diodorus and Libanius the philosopher. Then he lived in a cave for four years. He wrote two volumes of commentary on Matthew, two on John and an exegesis on the Pauline letters. His commentaries were didactic. He wrote homilies on feastdays and the priesthood. He wrote other texts remonstrating with heretics. He was as zealous as the prophet Elijah. He attracted the enmity and displeasure of the empress Eudoxia because he had accused her of having confiscated a vineyard belonging to a widow and called here the second Jezabel.



Theophilus of Alexandria and his nephew Cyril, who later succeeded his uncle, were envious of Chrysostom and planned an attack on him. They gathered 29 bishops who accused him of relying on the works of Origen, because he was continually reading and explaining them. They persuaded the Emperor to exile him. And he sent Chrysostom to Cappadocia. This caused a lot of trouble, and Chrysostom was recalled. Chrysostom continued berating the empress and compared her to Herodias. When she discovered this, she complained to Theophilus and other bishops in addition to John. They deposed and excommunicated John. Epiphanius bishop of Cyprus signed the excommunication order. He was then condemned and sent to the Pontus. He had been Patriarch for six years. After entering the religious life he did not swear or taste wine. He said that Epiphanius would not reach home alive, and Epiphanius said that he would not return from exile. In fact, Epiphanius died on the way to Cyprus.<sup>101</sup>

Theodore of Mopsuestia was informed of what had happened to John. He wrote to Arcadius a fine letter in favour of the persecuted bishop. But Arcadius was prevented by his wife from agreeing to support John, who wrote to thank Theodore. John died two years later in exile.

## 68 Story Yahbalaha<sup>102</sup> the monk, elected Catholicos

At the school of Mar 'Abda there was a virtuous man called Yahbalaha, the 'gift of God'. He was an excellent student, outstripping his fellows. Near the monastery of Mar Ezekiel the prophet was a village called Daskart d'Abisho, whose inhabitants had been converted by the wise scholar Mar 'Abda. They asked him to send them someone to explain what they needed. Yahbalaha went to them and built a large monastery. But he preferred the solitary life and withdrew to another convent on

<sup>101</sup>In some ways the whole episode is somewhat unsavoury and it is intriguing that these holy men seem to be as prone as anyone else to feelings of spite and resentment.

<sup>102</sup>Syriac version of 'Theodore'. Something like ܝܗܒܠܗܐ

the banks of the Tigris. The brothers heard of this and people began to flock to him. He divided them into three groups, ordering each group to sing the seven canonical hours for one hour and not to withdraw until they had finished. The following group was to continue so that the prayer was never interrupted, in order to imitate the angels. When the first group had left, some of the brothers were to go to the 'Saturday house', others to reading and teaching house, others to attend pilgrims, while others were able to rest. Then they went back to prayer, and they were followed by another group, always in the same order. Mar 'bda took care to visit them at the appointed times and monitor their exercises.

About this time there was no rain. The locals asked Yahbalaha, who prayed and it began to rain. On his way back to Persia Yazdgerd passed by the place and was surprised to see so many people there.

Among the philosophers and scholars of the time at Rome, Alexandria and Cyprus there was a certain Nemesius. He professed the philosophy of the ancients, but was baptized by Athanasius and began to combine philosophy and Christianity. He fought Valens and Claudius his general. He took an oath to do nothing. But they unleashed a storm of evil against him, which he bore with patience. He was then exiled to Siwa, where Nestorius had been exiled. After four years he returned home.

At Edessa there was a Mar Aba who struggled against Maximus the Arian and revealed his errors. Porphyrius of Antioch wrote a book on the faith and confirmed the belief of the 318. With his help and that of Acacius of Amid, the Catholicos Isaac and Marutha pronounced the canons relevant to the East. There was also Theophilus of Alexandria, Diodorus of Tarsus, John Chrysostom, Epiphanius of Cyprus. Some time earlier there was Eusebius of Caesarea, who wrote on the divine apparition, the portrait of the world, a church history, chronicle, a work on the depositions against Christ and the cessation of rainfall. He rejected orthodox belief, but was converted by Silvester of Rome, who converted Constantine and many Romans. There was also Alexander, Patriarch of Alexandria, who anathematized

Arius. His pupil Athanasius succeeded him and has left several books. In the East there was Isaac the Catholicos, but before him Mar Ephrem had written books on the Pentateuch, Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings, Job, the prophets. epistles of Paul, Bariamin. He also refuted Haphtus and Bardesanes. He explained the Diatessaron, refuted the Jews and left us homelies and poems on various subjects.

After John the see of Constantinople was occupied by Arsacius, brother of Nectarius, who died after only 14 months. He was succeeded by the perfectly orthodox Atticus, who reinstated the name of John in the diptychs of the fathers. Cyril condemned this and wrote to Atticus to impugn him and demand that Chrysostom's name be removed from the diptych.<sup>103</sup> Atticus refused. Before his death Atticus sent Cleophas, a priest of Nicaea, 300 gold pieces to be distributed among the poor. After a Patriarchate of 21 years he died on the 10th of October.

#### 69 Ahai the 15th Catholicos

On the death of Isaac, Marutha of Maiferqat chose in his place, with the agreement of the fathers and Yazdgerd, Ahai the disciple of Mar 'Abda. Before his election Ahai had been superior of the monastery of his pupils. As Catholicos he enjoyed the support of Yazdgerd, who later sent him to Persia because of the pearls being transported on ships from India and China that Nahruz his nephew, the governor of Persia, claimed had been stolen by pirates, so that Ahai could ascertain the truth of these allegations and report on them. When he arrived in Persia, the Catholicos wanted to know where those martyred by Shapur were buried. He made a written account of the martyrs in these areas and told Yazdgerd what he had seen. He had been trusted by the king and had considerable authority with him. He therefore asked the fathers to burn down all houses associated with magic and sorcery, because Christians had become associated with Marcionites and Manichaeans and adopted their practices. He then wrote a book about the martyrs in the East. Daniel son of Maryam did the same in his church history volume. He also wrote the life of

<sup>103</sup> Double panel ('double fold') in a church in which the names of the living and the dead were inscribed. The 'living' side usually included the name of the bishop to indicate that the local church was 'in communion' with him. Removal of the bishop's name from the diptych indicated a rift between the two.

his teacher Mar 'Abda. He was in office for four years, seven months and a few days. May God grant his soul eternal rest.

#### 70 the Emperor Theodosius the Younger

When Arcadius died, at the time of Yazdgerd, he was thirty-three and had been Emperor for twenty-six years, half when his father was still alive and half on his own. His son Theodosius succeeded him when he was nine, at the same as his uncle Honorius, in year 721 of Alexander. The barbarians rebelled against his uncle and chose a king. In agreement with his nephew Theodosius, Honorius sent troops against them and killed them. Honorius died in year 734 of Alexander aged 38. He had reigned 28 years, two of them with his father and 26 alone. The empire was governed by Theodosius. While his mother was alive, he was orthodox and did not deviate from the right path. But alone he was led astray by his sister Pulcheria and brother-in-law Valentinian, who persuaded him to abandon the true faith and belief.

#### 71 Yahbalaha I the 16th Catholicos

On the death of Ahai the Catholicos the father and the faithful assembled to elect a replacement. Yahbalaha was well-known for his virtue and zeal, as we said earlier. Yazdgerd knew him so well that he ordered him to be appointed Catholicos in the 16th year of his reign. Three years after his election, Theodosius the son of Emperor Arcadius sent Acacius of Amid with a letter for Yazdgerd. Together with Yahbalaha, Acacius fixed the rules necessary for guiding the Church and the faithful, confirmed the decrees of Nicaea and Isaac the Catholicos as well as other decrees. He ordered them to be observed in detail. In this year Theophilus, who had excommunicated Chrysostom, died and was succeeded by his nephew Cyril in year 4 of the catholicate of Yahbalaha. Yazdgerd thanked Theodosius for sending Acacius to him. In his turn he sent Yahbalaha to the Emperor with a letter and magnificent gifts. He wrote to his friends telling them to shower Yahbalaha with gifts and treat him with the greatest respect. On arriving at Theodosius' court the Catholicos handed over the

letter and gave assurances of the orthodoxy of the Persian Church, the unity of its doctrine and the rejection of the two substances. Theodosius admired the intelligence of the Catholicos, offered him much money and gifts of what could not be found in Persia. He offered Yabhalaha anything he wanted. On his return to his see he restored the church of Seleucia and built others with what he had received from Theodosius. Yazdgerd soon abandoned his policy of toleration and kindness towards Christians. His general Shapur persecuted them and destroyed their churches. Yazdgerd's headaches started again. Unable to find relief he sent for the catholicos, whose prayers restored his health to him. Yazdgerd then stopped demolishing churches and exiling Christians. But Yabhalaha continued to pray to our Lord (blessed be His name) that he would not see the shedding of the blood of the faithful and let him die beforehand. His prayer was answered and he died. Let his prayers be with us. He was in office for 5 years. After his death Yazdgerd began to destroy churches, exile Christians and unleash a terrible persecution of them. Among those killed was Rabban 'Abda bishop of Susiane, a virtuous and scholarly man. The reason for the persecution was as follows: a priest named Hosea had destroyed the fire-temple near the church in Susiane and put out the fire because Christians were sustaining losses because of the temple guards. Yazdgerd became angry and ordered churches to be demolished. Matters remained thus until Isaac the patricius of Armenia spoke to him in favour of the Christians. Thanks to his intervention the Armenians submitted to Yazdgerd, who ended the persecution and allayed their fears. God is our helper.

72 Ma'ana the 17th Catholicos, who was deposed.

The Christians needed a successor of Yabhalaha. Ma'ana the metropolitan of Persia knew Persian and Syriac. He had studied at Edessa and translated several books from Syriac into Persian. Yazdgerd knew him because he had been introduced to him with Yabhalaha. The Christians asked for the help of Mirshapur, head of the militia, with Yazdgerd to get Ma'ana elected. To achieve this they offered him a large sum of money. Mirshapur helped them. He asked for an audience with the king and said to him: 'Ma'ana is Persian, capable of serving you. Allow him to be elected

Catholicos.' The Christians, happy with the result, were hoping to see the restoration of the churches and the end of the persecution. But their hope, to quote Isaiah, was soon disappointed.<sup>104</sup> Indeed, one day when Ma'ana presented himself before Yazdgerd, with some of the fathers, the king stared at them. They realized that he was working on a pretext to persecute them, a pretext that he found in the behaviour of Hosea, about whom we spoke earlier. The king added: 'Caesar is the absolute master of his kingdom. He does as he wishes. I am also the absolute master of my kingdom. I will do as I wish.' The king repeated these words twice.<sup>105</sup> A priest of Seleucia called Narsai replied to the king for the Catholicos: 'Your Majesty, Caesar has no power in his kingdom beyond exacting tribute and taxes and killing those hostile to him. But he does not have the power to force them to give up their religion. In fact, despite the many Jews, Christians and pagans, he does not force them to change their belief.' The king was furious, and those with him thought that Narsai should be put to death for this statement. The Catholicos then said: 'Narsai has done no more than reply to the king. He does not deserve to be killed.' Yazdgerd ordered him to be beheaded if he did not deny Christ. He ordered the garments of the Catholicos to be torn and the Catholicos to be exiled to Persia and his name ever to be said again publicly, not even in enmity. Hosea of Nisibis and Bata of Lasom tried to plead their cause, but they were stopped and asked to leave. The Magi worked hard to recruit Narsai for their religion, but his faith was unshakeable. He was beheaded and buried by the faithful in the great church of Seleucia.

Ma'ana went to Persia. Yazdgerd, on learning that he was administering his diocese from there, refused to tolerate it and had him incarcerated. He spent some time in prison before being liberated by several headmen. It was prohibited to call him 'Catholicos' during his lifetime and even after his death. He died in Persia. May God be pleased with him.

### **73. The Conversion of the People of Najran**

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<sup>105</sup>Details of this sort give one the impression that this story must have been repeated so often that it has achi

In the land of Najran in Yemen there was a well-known merchant in the time of Yazdgerd called Hannan. One day he went to Constantinople on business. He returned home and then set out for Persia. As he was passing Hira, he spent some time with Christians and learned their teaching. He was baptized and stayed there some time. He then went back to his own country and tried to persuade others to accept Christianity. He baptized members and others in his country and neighbouring regions. They helped him to convert the people of Himyar and the surrounding area of Abyssinia. Later a Jewish king called Masruq ruled over this area. His mother was Jewish, a captive brought from Nisibis sold to a king of Yemen. She taught her son Judaism. When he ascended his father's throne, he killed many Christians. All this is related by Barsahde in his history.

#### **74. The death of Yazdgerd and accession of his son**

The Magi began to hate Yazdgerd because he maltreated them on his accession, reduced the power of the leaders and was favourable to Christians, allowing them to build churches. They made fun of him and cursed him in their fire temples. But he was protected by the prayers of the fathers addressed to God against the devil in accordance with the promise of Our Lord to the apostles. But when Yahbalaha died and Ma'ana was exiled, Yazdgerd was possessed by the devil, who succeeded in doing what he wanted with him. The king suffered more and more from headache, of which he died. This death was the occasion for the Magi of great rejoicing. His reign lasted for 21 years and 9 months. He was succeeded by his son Bahrâm. The Magi were afraid that he would follow in the footsteps of his father. But he had a great passion for games and women. He destroyed churches, dug up the bones of martyrs and threw them into the river. On the advice of the head of the army he threw Christians into prison. He seized the sacred ornaments which Yahbalaha had brought back from the Roman empire, broke treaties with them and became friendly to the Magi.

## **75. The holy martyr Mar James the decimated**

In year three of Bahrâm James was martyred. He was a Christian from Gundeshapur, a well-known place in Persia. Yazdgerd was very fond of him and persuaded him to renounce Christianity. He showered him with honours and made him head of the Persian administration. But his mother and his wife found out and wrote from Gundeshapur to Seleucia-Ctesiphon to reprove him and express their disapproval of his exchanging religion for the transience of the world. They refused to go and meet him if he persisted in his error. James read the the letter, repented and renounced Magism. The news was brought to Bahrâm, who summoned him and asked: 'Are you a Christian ?' 'Yes, and I am proud of it.' The angry monarch said: 'Did you not receive gifts from my father for converting to Magism ?' James replied: 'Do not press me any further. Do not seek to frighten me. Once the stone has left the sling it does not come back. Listen to me. I will never again renounce Christianity for Magism. ' The Magi who were present condemned him to death. But the king, hoping to bring him back to Magism with threats of torture, ordered his limbs to be cut off one by one. The saint was not troubled. Each time a limb was cut off, he thanked God. With only his head, chest and belly left he sought the words of the Psalms: 'I am leaving the prison of my body to give thanks to You and praise You.' Finally, he was decapitated on Friday in November year 734 of Alexander.

## **76. Aqbalaha bishop of Beit Garmai**

This saint's father was of a noble family, friend of Shapur the Persian king, who asked him to worship the sun. The father agreed, but the son Aqbalaha refused. He became a monk at the age of fifteen, renouncing the world and its temptations. He then became a priest. He baptized those in a village of Beit Garmai, which used to belong to his father. He cured Bahrâm's daughter of an illness and asked him not to



persecute Christians any more. The king was amenable to the request, but, having been put to flight by the Romans, he reneged on his promise and started his persecution once again. There were no archbishops or bishops left of those who were in the days ...<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>106</sup>Lacuna